

# WNBA All-Star Game TEAM WNBA vs. USA NATIONAL TEAM

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Las Vegas, Nevada

## Commissioner Cathy Engelbert

Commissioner Media Conference

CATHY ENGELBERT: Great to see you live, some of you, and some of you on Zoom. Thanks for joining today. I'm going to spend literally two minutes, and first thank you for your ongoing coverage of the WNBA. The momentum continues to grow. You're a big part of telling the stories of these amazing players and what they're accomplishing both on and off the court. So thank you again for that.

So I was reflecting on the flight here yesterday. It was two years ago, almost today, that I was four days on the job, got on a plane, stood up in front of a much bigger room, but obviously with COVID protocols we're a little smaller today. And I stood up here for my first press conference as commissioner. And wow, what a two years it has been for both the WNBA and the world.

But we're looking to the future. And we're really, really excited to be back in Las Vegas in front of some fans later today at the AT&T WNBA 2021 All-Star Game. I couldn't be more excited to be celebrating our 25th season, celebrating our 1996 Olympic gold-medal-winning USA Women's National Team. All of that to come later this afternoon.

But a special thanks to MGM for hosting us. World-class facilities, as you see. We'll be over at Mandalay Bay, Michelob ULTRA Arena. And thanks to AT&T, our presenting sponsor for this year's All-Star Game; ESPN as our broadcast partner, our great broadcast partner; and Mountain Dew, who will sponsor the 3-Point competition at halftime today.

None would be possible without the support of all of our partners. A special shout-out to our WNBA Changemakers, AT&T, Deloitte, Nike and we added Google this year; you might have seen that.

These companies, if you think about it, this was a concept that we launched when I first came into the league two



years ago. And these companies have just shown extraordinary commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion that I had not seen before, particularly in women's sports. So really, really excited to continue to celebrate with those companies and more.

And so it has been a challenging year. I come from a family of -- my two sisters are nurses; we've got doctors, respiratory therapists. I would be remiss if I didn't continue to thank our health-care workers and all the supporting organizations who helped us get to a 99 percent fully vaccinated rate in this league. It really is a major accomplishment. The players really stepped up here and took on the responsibility around their own personal health and got vaccinated.

So being back in our arenas with fans -- limited but hopefully coming off the Olympic break that gets opened up -- is a great feeling. I think you'll see a lot of energy in the arena tonight.

We are here to celebrate the best athletes in the world. What better way to send our Olympians off to Tokyo than to have this format this year of Team USA, the All-Stars voted in as Team USA, against the Team WNBA. We're so excited for this game, but also this as a send-off for these elite athletes to Tokyo.

Congratulations to all the All-Stars -- the Women's National Team, 5X5. The USA 3X3 team will be really exciting this year. First time in the Olympics, number one most popular urban sport globally. It's going to be a really interesting format to see in Tokyo this year.

We have many other Olympians playing in the WNBA who will be competing in Tokyo for their national teams -- Liz Cambage and Kia Nurse, Ji-Su Park. We're excited for them as well.

And we have a lot of rising stars in the All-Star Game. Eight first-timers as WNBA All-Stars. Betnijah Laney from the New York Liberty, really playing great; Dearica Hamby from the Las Vegas Aces; Satou Sabally from the Dallas Wings, just to name a few of those eight. Think of that as the next generation of talent in this league. I think you would agree that the state of the league is strong from a talent perspective with those players being first-time All-Stars.



This season, and I didn't even know this until my team accumulated this data, we've seen incredible buzzer beaters, 11 overtime games. Scoring at one of the highest points per game in WNBA history. Record-setting performances. You saw Diana Taurasi hit 9,000 career points; Tina Charles moving into second place for career doubles-doubles; Sylvia Fowles becoming the WNBA total defensive rebound leader; and Sue Bird, no surprise, becoming the first WNBA player to reach 3,000 assists. And we still have a lot more games to play this season. So really great accomplishment so far.

Behind the scenes, we are still working really hard at transforming the league. We've been fortunate to bring on new partners like Google, like Amazon Prime Video doing their game of the week, and they'll have our exciting and inaugural first Commissioner's Cup Championship Game coming off the break. Thanks to them for stepping up.

And congratulations to the Connecticut Sun and Seattle Storm for being the inaugural winners of the Commissioner's Cup play in the first half of the season. They'll compete in that inaugural championship game in Phoenix.

After the Olympic break, we're going to continue our 25th anniversary celebrations. We'll have the W25 naming the 25 best players all time in the league. So we'll be out with some more information on that and the voting for that during the Olympic break. Then we'll have some more exciting news during the break and into a very strong finish to the regular season into the playoffs.

So finally I hope you saw, because I listened to you all, we're updating our media protocols coming out of the Olympic break.

You all have been so patient as we've worked through this ongoing, very challenging situation. And so again thank you. The updates include in-person media, access on game days, including interviews pregame, on the court, postgame access. We'll include a mix of in-person and then Zoom interviews. Trying to get as much access to the coaches and players as we come off this Olympic break.

But again thank you to everyone who made All-Star possible today. We're excited to see these world-class athletes take the floor and really compete. This is going to be a competition between Team USA and Team WNBA.

With that, I would love to take your questions. Thanks for being here.

**Q. Do you feel good about the individual financial**

**health of each franchise at this point coming off the difficulties of COVID? And could you also maybe give us parameters in terms of post-Olympic break, the number of fans, if that will be a decision each franchise makes or how that will work?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: So financial health of our franchises. Last year we flipped the business model around because of no fans. We took on some of the expenses at the league to put on the Wubble in Florida at IMG Academy. We're still in recovery from that and limited fans so far this year.

Some markets didn't start with fans, but now all markets have fans. I think coming off the Olympic break, what we will do is a team still needs to comply with their state and local rules and regulations. You see here in Vegas there aren't many, but in some cities there still are.

Teams still need to abide by that. But we will open things up with close to a 100 percent fully vaccinated league -- again, not just players; players and staff. We feel really good about, number one was player health and safety and that of our staff. And with almost 100 percent fully vaccinated, we feel good about the data and the readouts.

Although obviously fully vaccinated people can still get the virus, I think as a society we're going to see this evolve into something that we're going to have to live with even as fully vaccinated and whether there will be boosters required. We'll be monitoring that as we get over the next three and a half, four weeks. Obviously, health and safety of our players broadly over in Tokyo is important as well.

The teams are already preparing, and we have been for about a month now as we knew we were going to get to that 99 percent vaccination rate. We've been preparing to open up for more fans, more courtside seats, because the fan experience is so enhanced the closer you are to the court. So that's what we'll be doing. And I expect you'll see a different look in many arenas when we come back off the Olympic break.

But really proud of the teams and where they are and the strength of the teams. As I said, we have a lot of transition work to do between the league and teams coming off the pandemic, but really proud where we are from a team and league perspective.

**Q. Two questions about the Commissioner's Cup. First one, I believe this year they're making more money for winning it than they do for winning a WNBA Championship. I'm curious if you tried to find someone to sponsor the WNBA Finals and the financials to make it more valuable to win that title**

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**than the Commissioner's Cup title? And going forward, the Commissioner's Cup is obviously in a good spot now because of the Olympic break and coming back from it. Is there a landing spot for it next year? Down the road, will it be All-Star break or whenever to figure out where this thing might have a permanent home, so to speak?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Good question. We boldly put a half-a-million-dollar prize pool for the Commissioner's Cup this year. One, we're trying to build it into an asset, into a rivalry setting between Western Conference, Eastern Conference teams. That's all part of the strategy to build rivalries, build household names, grow the game and viewership, grow compelling games and content. And that's what's happened so far this year. We're pleased with that.

We felt we needed to put a significant prize pool up that the winning team, each player will be awarded \$30,000 and the runner-up will get 10,000 per. So we didn't do a lot of "let's compare it to the WNBA Finals," because that's all part of the season and their salary for the season leading into the Finals. And, yes, there's bonuses for other things like MVP and other types of things, not only for the Finals but also Defensive Player of the Year and All-WNBA Team, et cetera. We look at all of our prize money, bonus money, in addition to player salary, player comp, player benefits, as a holistic thing, not comparing one competition to another.

But we're really excited about the ability to pay a significant prize pool. It was a commitment we made as part of collective bargaining that we would find ways to compensate the players more. The Commissioner's Cup is a promise around that.

As far as the timing next year, so this year it did work with the Olympic break, although obviously our footprint is very challenging. Next year there will be a FIBA World Cup on the back of the season. That's a challenge. I would expect we'll still play the Commissioner's Cup the first half of the season, and then probably coming off the All-Star break or maybe integrated with the All-Star break due to the Commissioner's Cup Championship. But next year it has its challenges because it's a FIBA World Cup year.

**Q. Candace Parker became the first woman, the first WNBA player on 2K this morning. And I wonder if you could speak to the significance for not only Candace but this league and its growth, seeing a woman on the cover and a player on the cover?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: For people that didn't see, Candace is the first woman ever on the 2K game, this year.

It's really exciting. I think it's a signal and a sign of the momentum around our players, our players' story. Candace has been such a great representative of the league -- what she does in broadcast, what she does as a mom. I just think as a role model, I get chills just standing up here talking about her on that cover.

The WNBA being on the cover of Sports Illustrated. I walked into an airport and saw that and I said, How many young girls and young boys will see that, see these role models? That's why I thanked you all in the beginning, how important it is to give that exposure so that the next generation -- because I'm a huge believer in sports.

Candace has been such a great representative of someone who has gained confidence over her college and then pro career and then into the broadcast world. I think it's a signal. I think it's a sign. I think the ability to capitalize on the momentum that Candace and some of our other household-name players bring is really outstanding.

I think the support from the whole ecosystem has been so important here in people thinking, yes, we can put Candace on the cover. Yes, Chiney (Ogwumike) can get her own radio show. Yes, Renee Montgomery can become an owner in the WNBA. Think of everything that's happened over the last few months from that perspective. I think it's a signal that the WNBA is here to stay, and the next 25 years are going to be really interesting.

**Q. The new "Space Jam" comes out later this week featuring both Diana Taurasi and Nneka Ogumike. This was something that even when you first started a couple years ago, we didn't have. What's that significance? How important is it for this next generation of kids to grow up and see some of the league's biggest stars represented in off-the-court media like that?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: It's a really important point. If I think about, in my old life, we used to say you can't be what you can't see. Now these athletes, these young girls and boys -- it's not just girls; youth basketball players, youth sports -- can see in "Space Jam," on the cover of Slam magazine, in 2K. And also, I think it's been pretty interesting to see a couple of the ads, commercials that have happened. Carmax with Sue Bird and Steph Curry and how effective that was. DoorDash with Chiney. State Farm, as well, with Sabrina (Ionescu) and Chris Paul.

Again, just put all that together and think about the exposure that that gives these WNBA players as role models and their communities in society. It gets other corporates and other media companies thinking, yes, we need to give that athlete exposure, too, because that

athlete is elite, is fabulous, is juggling a lot of things.

A lot of our players are moms. They're juggling other jobs, juggling going overseas. It's really important to really highlight their accomplishments. I would not have thought two years ago when I came into the league we'd have two players headlined with LeBron James in that movie. So that's going to be exciting to see and market off of as well.

**Q. Question about the travel. The last couple of weeks has been a little bit of, I guess, couple of travel issues with teams trying to get around. I know that's kind of been a little bit of an issue in the past. Curious what the league's perspective is on that and how do you see it evolving in the future? Is that more of an individual team thing or is this something that the league looks at as a whole?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: It's a good question. It's something we monitor very closely. Unfortunately, and I've been on the road to nine WNBA markets in three weeks and have had many, many delays. I'm not a professional athlete. But summer travel is very, very tough with thunderstorms and Tropical Storm Elsa.

It's tough. People don't think we're monitoring; we're monitoring every flight of every team to every market and when they would get in and what time the game is. We're constantly monitoring it. But as you know, through the collective bargaining process in '19 into early '20, we had many discussions with all of our stakeholders and the union about the best path forward in this collective bargaining agreement based on where we were economically as a league and the teams.

We continue to look at it and we continue to monitor it. I wish we had an economic model that supported what I know we all want here. But we don't have that today. We're working -- that's why the transformation of this league and the teams is really important to move that forward, whether it's in the next collective bargaining or even sooner than that. It's something we're monitoring all the time.

Summer travel, for all who have traveled -- thunderstorms, especially when you go O'Hare to New York or Indy to New York, it's tough. I actually got diverted, after 90 minutes in the air, to Cleveland the other day on my way to Newark. Nothing easy about summer travel. But we do monitor it and we do take very seriously the health and safety of our players. That's why in '19 we approved chartered travel during playoffs from West to East, because the players wouldn't have had enough rest and we wanted to make sure we put the best product on the court every night. It's challenging, I do admit, but we're monitoring it all the time.

**Q. Now that the WNBA has kind of resumed, have you begun talks or got with your team with regard to expansion and putting more teams in other premier spots, like going back to San Antonio or possibly coming to Florida or other states like that?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: I think the topic of expansion is always something we're thinking about, especially as we see the depth and breadth of the league. We see the globalization of our game, more global players coming into our game.

You see the free agency. I think what happened in collective bargaining around free agency has been really exciting. But then it doesn't free up as much spots for rookies coming in and players to get drafted. So expansion definitely is on the list.

As I told people, I think in advance of the draft, I said this would be something I would be talking with you more seriously about if it wasn't for the pandemic. But given that we had no fans last year and limited fans this year -- we're evaluating it constantly. I would say about this time next year we'll be talking a lot more seriously about what that path looks like, how many teams, where, what cities.

We have to do very thoughtful analysis about that. That's what we're working on now. We're starting that analysis, but nothing yet to commit to. Nothing yet to talk about other than I do think I'd like to consider it when you're only in 12 markets and you're in a country of our size and scale. There are some cities where you would think a WNBA team would thrive. Those are the things we're going to start to look at. It will be data-driven. It will be driven by fans. It will be driven by the popularity of the game at the college level. All those factors.

A lot of things to look at when you try to select the next best place to put a WNBA team, whether it was a prior WNBA team, that market that thrived, or a new market where there hasn't been a WNBA team. We're open to all of those. I get a lot of suggestions through social media about cities, and I'm sure those will keep coming. But we listen and we look at all the data. And, again, I would say once we get through this season, going into next year, as we come off free agency in the offseason, we'll be seriously thinking about what that could look like in the future.

**Q. This is the first year that you're having All-Star during an Olympic year. How open are you to facilitating more events like this in future Olympic years? And what overall league events can we look forward to, any potential pop culture intersectional**

## type of WNBA events?

CATHY ENGELBERT: It's a very good question, because, yes, we usually don't do an All-Star Game in an Olympic year. We didn't have one planned for last year, and then the Olympics got postponed and we had the Wubble and no ability to have an All-Star Game. It wouldn't have made sense last year.

This year is a more scaled-down version, but I'm thrilled we're having one. Just being here, I think you're going to see the energy in the arena tonight.

To me, it was really important to have an All-Star Game this year, not only for fan engagement, media engagement, but also for the players. It struck me when Sue Bird was in that CarMax commercial, talking about how many years she was an All-Star, that the one thing the NBA doesn't have, they play one every year; we don't play one every fourth year. I wanted to make sure these players could call themselves an All-Star this year. That's certainly something we'll continue.

Other events, so, as you know, Commissioner's Cup we introduced this year. We're looking at an additional type of competition, as you said, kind of a festival-type format. We're working on that. Because we're still not sure where we'll be at this time next year, we're planning but it's hard to envision how we could come together as a festival, as a first-year stand-up type of competition.

But it's something, we committed to ways to find fan engagement, to grow the game, to grow viewers, to grow the players in pop culture. And whether it's music or art or food or different things that I learned in the Wubble that the players are really passionate about, those are the types of things we'll look at. And we'll partner with the Players Association on hopefully an additional competition. Whether it's in '22 or '23 is unknown yet, but we're doing a fair amount of planning what the format would look like because that was a commitment we made in collective bargaining.

**Q. In regard to the 3-Point Contest this year, what went into the decision to select the players on the roster? And was there any reason why Shekinna Stricklen was omitted from the roster this year, the defending 3-Point champion?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Obviously, no Skills competition this year. Just trying to pack everything into today, essentially, last night into today. Not having an All-Star night the day before just because of COVID and the protocols, and as we were planning we didn't know where we would be, whether we would even have fans for an

All-Star Game. That was part of it.

We said we think we can -- the 3-Point competition is usually one of our most popular fan-engagement events. We can hold it at halftime, a scaled-down version -- four players; I think we usually have six or so. Because players are under protocol here, who are here anyway, that is why the players who got selected got selected, because they were here anyway. We weren't going to bring players who weren't otherwise All-Stars or connected with USAB into the 3-Point competition.

It's just an unusual year, one we hope not to repeat. We can broaden the pool and make sure that players who may not make the All-Star team could compete next year in both the 3-Point and Skills competition.

Then there might be other formats we might introduce. We're trying to innovate and think about other ways to introduce. That's why I think 3X3 is going to be exciting to watch. A 10-minute outdoor game, maybe that's something we put into one of our competitions in the future. We're going to try to think broadly and innovate and then determine which players would be best fan favorites for those type of events.

**Q. When it comes to the Commissioner's Cup, what has your assessment been of fan reaction and excitement around those games? Is there anything that you're already planning on changing or adjusting when it comes to this first year?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Great question. Because this is our first year, we learned some things about how to market around Commissioner's Cup. I think you're going to see a different way to market going into the clinching games, so we were out there marketing the clinching games. Hopefully you picked that up. We did it a little later than I would have liked.

We'll look at this as building those conference rivalries and ultimately competing for that prize pool. I think the prize pool really made the players show up during those Commissioner's Cup games. Because there were 10 per team -- and we'll get into a regular regimen as to the format -- but I think we have to continue with the 10 because if you try to put it in the first half of the season so you can play the championship in the back half, I think that will stick.

My assessment is marketing, marketing, marketing, which I talk about a lot. I talked about it when I came into the league, not knowing anything. It's still something we need to double down on and make sure that as we grow this into something that the players really compete for it. We'll

actually have a physical cup, so that will be cool. You haven't seen it yet, but you'll see it in August. I think that will just become something that the players want to vie for.

And also activating in local markets Commissioner's Cup games. We had so much squeezed into the first half of the season, with theme nights and Pride Month and Women's History Month and Black History Month. We would like the Commissioner's Cup to become part of the social justice platform of the players. That's something you'll see a little more next year in kind of Commissioner's Cup 2.0.

**Q. Earlier this year you mentioned that the importance of an independent Black media involvement of promoting this league and also involving Black businesses. I'm asking are any Black businesses being used in the games today? Also, are there any plans on meeting with independent Black business owners in some respect because with the post-pandemic changes we're concerned that we might be pushed out. And we want to make sure that our concerns and our issues will be heard as well?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Great question. So, yes, we've been doing a variety of things, both activating -- a lot of the Black medium-sized and small business activation has been at the local team level. But also at the league level, for instance, we partnered on the health-care side, because as you may recall, I talked about our social justice council this year having as one of their pillars health inequities, particularly in communities of color. We've been partnering with organizations who focus on health inequity in communities of color.

One of those was a vaccine effort that we did. We partnered with an organization and Walmart to bring vaccines into communities. And so, yes, we continue to look for opportunities to engage with Black-owned businesses. We continue our efforts around our diversity and coaching initiative, our diversity-in-staff initiative here at the league and at the teams. There's not a meeting that goes by where I and others on my team don't ask questions about making sure that we retain our focus on making sure we're engaging with Black-owned businesses.

I know again our teams, there's probably a long list. I haven't inventoried it all, but we're constantly getting updates from our Board of Governors, our owners and our team presidents on their efforts around this. Again, at every meeting with our Board of Governors we talk about engaging with Black-owned businesses and our diversity and coaching initiative.

**Q. I know I'm not the only kid who is loving the new WNBA gear. But some of the coolest stuff is not in kid**

**sizes. Are there any plans to come out with more WNBA apparel in kid sizes to continue to expand the fan base to kids? And what other ways are you looking to continue to make the WNBA more interesting and more available to kids?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Great. Merchandise, I know, from my first 12-city tour, and my tour of the nine markets of the 12 so far this year, how important merchandise, and in all sizes, kid sizes and everything.

We've been working with our merchandise partners. I hope you saw now the ball is available, the WNBA ball, which was not available at retail, then maybe on Amazon last year and Spalding, is now available not only on Wilson.com but also available at Dick's and Walmart. I believe we're trying to get it into more retail because it's a big symbol of brand. If a young girl can go to Dick's and see the WNBA ball, it's a huge brand builder.

We're working on trying to get more youth merch. I do think Fanatics and the WNBA Store, there's more youth merch than last year. I know it's not good enough, but we're still working on a holistic merchandise strategy to make sure we're covering more requests. I know people want more shirts, socks, the headbands that players wear.

I get a lot of requests for merchandise. I think that's great, because it's part of the brand and part of building the brand. It's great that our fans are so passionate about having access to merchandise when they want it, in the sizes they want. So, yes, it's definitely part of what we're working on.

Hopefully you've seen some difference, because I've at least seen a lot more merch. Especially with our 25th anniversary merch, which I've seen a fair amount of people walking around Las Vegas in. That's pretty cool. Coming into next year, 26th year, doing more things around merch, broadening the selection, I'll call it.

**Q. In Las Vegas, through the history that they've had in the league, I've noticed that they've been inviting players from all three of the different iterations of the franchise to Aces games. I'm just curious, if you could tell us a little bit more. I know you touched on this in your opening, but what are some of the activations that the alumna of the WNBA are being involved in? How are they going to be honored in this historic season and maybe even beyond? I also wanted to ask you, the Seattle Storm will eventually get to share an arena with the Seattle Kraken. And they'll officially have the most banners in Climate Pledge Arena. Any plans to maybe have events at some of the arenas that are new and renovated for fan events like All-Star or**



## other things like that?

CATHY ENGELBERT: First to address, I just met yesterday with Mark Davis of the Las Vegas Aces, one of our new owners this year. Obviously I've known about the effort to look at their legacy and history from when they were in San Antonio and Utah and bring that 25-year anniversary together and bring back some of the legends that they have. I think it's fabulous.

If you look at the Liberty, in Phoenix and L.A., they also have been original franchises around for 25 years. They're doing a fair amount there. We're doing a fair amount here, bringing back the '96 Olympic team, who, basically when they won that gold medal, that triggered the formation of the WNBA, the launch of the WNBA a year later. That's pretty cool. Some of them were here. I met some of them last night. Legendary names.

I do think it's important. What we're trying to do in the 25th season is balance the players today and building them into household names and rivalries with the history of the league as well.

Val Ackerman will be here later. We'll celebrate her. She'll go into the Naismith Hall of Fame this year. We just have so much to celebrate and so much history -- now that we've been around 25 years -- to pick up on and to market. I'm thrilled that the teams are taking that on.

Seattle, we're really looking forward to the arena being completed and the Seattle Storm getting their home back. I think obviously we look forward to when that happens. I think next year it's scheduled for.

Certainly we'll evaluate where we do our events at different times of year. As we add competitions and things like that, Seattle would definitely be something on the list for that over time.

We're constantly looking at where to hold events. Phoenix is where we're hosting the inaugural Commissioner's Cup this year, because we know Phoenix just renovated their arena. They really know how to put on events.

I was out there for a game a couple of weeks ago. It's going to be great. I didn't know the Phoenix Suns were going to be in the NBA Finals when we selected that. But I think that's great, too, because basketball is so popular and so hot in Phoenix right now. And it is so hot in Phoenix right now.

So certainly we'll look at the new arena in Seattle. We're really excited for them to come back home into Seattle.

**Q. I'm curious about how much you want to open up mutual conversations about much more activated interactions between the WNBA and our own domestic Japanese Basketball Women's League. What do you think about it?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Yes, so great question. And we're really rooting for you all in Tokyo with the Olympics in a week or so with opening ceremonies. So good luck with that.

But absolutely. You may not know this, but right before the pandemic I met with some of the leadership of basketball in Japan. And again, as I think about how we grow our fan base, it has to have a global element to it. We have to globalize our game. We have to bring the WNBA into markets where now our players are coming from being drafted into the league and we're having increasing amount of international players in the WNBA.

So, absolutely, always open to discussions. We have been doing that with some of the federations already and did meet with Japan. And then the pandemic hit. I think it was like two weeks later. So that kind of cooled discussions for a while.

But we'd love to restart those discussions and talk about, again, how we can build and grow this game globally, the women's game globally. So thank you for your interest. Good luck and I hope everything goes great in Tokyo.

**Q. Are you coming to Japan here this summer?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: Not now. I was planning to and I had arrangements, but obviously we got word that we shouldn't come because no international fans. I would be considered a fan even though I'm the Commissioner of the WNBA. I will not be there. But I'll be rooting very heavily here from the United States.

**Q. Two questions about merchandise. With eight first-time All-Stars, I know a lot of people wanted to buy merchandise. Why isn't there any merchandise online right now for the All-Star Game? And then, you talk about building household names. But with some of the athletes I've spoken to, the legends of the WNBA, they kind of felt they've been forgotten about, especially when you go online and say you type in a Lisa Leslie or Sheryl Swoopes or Tamika Catchings, their name doesn't come up with any merchandise. Has there been discussion for potentially doing celebratory merchandise for the legends of the game?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: I know how passionate everyone is about merch. I know how important it is for the brand. I



think we've been working on the 25th anniversary aspect of merchandise this year, the new ball, the new Nike uniform. We've actually had a lot of upgrades and things in merch. But you make a good point about the legends of the game. Obviously, we're trying to integrate the legends.

We have Lisa Leslie and Tina Thompson as co-head coaches for Team WNBA today. We have the '96 Olympic team. It's a good thing. I'll take that back around, merchandise for legends, and make sure that if that's something we think will sell and promote the brand and grow the game, that's something we'd be willing to invest in as well with our merchandise partners. Thank you for the suggestion. I will bring that back and we'll take a look at it. Thank you.

**Q. NIL, Name, Image and Likeness, laws have gone into effect across the country this month. Curious how much that's something you are monitoring. Obviously it's at the college level. How much are you tracking that? What do you think that will mean to the growth of women's basketball as a whole?**

CATHY ENGELBERT: It's a great question. So what's really interesting to me about the NIL -- and I've been studying it since when I first came into the league. I think one of my first interviews on ESPN, and they were like, What do you think about the NIL? I didn't even know what that was, by the way. I've learned a lot over the past couple of years.

I'm really interested now because I've done this assessment over the past 18 months or so of the evaluation of women's sports assets, not just WNBA: patch on the uniform; placement on the court; media right fee deal; an NIL -- Name, Image, Likeness for college players.

There are very popular (women's) college players right now, as you know. Two of them have a higher social media following than any of the men's NCAA basketball players.

It will be very interesting. Absolutely, monitoring. I think this could be a very good thing, as they come into their professional careers into the WNBA, to already have partnerships with companies who want to elevate their brand. So I think it can only help. I do have some worries that, again, because I'm pretty sure that women's sports are undervalued in the marketplace, that that will happen as well in the college game, compared to obviously the big business of college football and (men's) college basketball and other sports as well. But I think net-net it's going to be a huge positive for women's sports, for players who then continue their professional career.

One of my goals also is to do a better job of integrating them from a brand perspective and raising their brand value once they come in as a professional basketball player from the college ranks. From that perspective, to me, this will be a huge positive.

We're monitoring it. It will be interesting to see what ultimate future WNBA players are able to enhance their brand through the Name, Image, Likeness rules now.

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