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The National Basketball Association Communications

Strategy for the 2019-20 Season Restart

Trevor Dale Jones

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The National Basketball Association Communications Strategy for the 2019-20 Season Restart

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This paper analyzes the National Basketball Association's communications efforts from June 4 to July 30, 2020 as it prepared for an unprecedented season restart in the early days of a global pandemic. While scholars have examined the media's framing of the NBA in this period, there is a gap in the literature when looking at the official NBA communications strategy of the organization itself. As the first study to use risk communication theory in a sports scenario while also employing corporate social advocacy as the second theoretical basis of analysis, this qualitative study is a thematic and textual analysis of 14 NBA press releases and three existing video interviews of NBA Commissioner Adam Silver. Findings show that risk communication theory holds up in a sports context as the NBA employed effective use of widely accepted risk communication criteria. The study also puts forth a basis for CSA in sports communication regarding social justice.

Key Terms: framing, NBA, risk communication, corporate social advocacy, textual/thematic analysis, press release

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Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the National Basketball Association announced it would suspend the 2019-20 season immediately after a player tested positive for COVID-19 (Galily, 2021). The league's sudden decision created a domino-effect not only in the sports world, but among the general public, leading to the cancellation of large gatherings in virtually every sector to prevent spread (Jones, 2020). The biggest question in the minds of fans, pundits, and athletes in the aftermath of the decision: "what's next?" The association's brief official statement equivocated in what at the time was its only option – "The NBA is suspending game play... until further notice. The NBA will use this hiatus to determine next steps for moving forward in regard to the coronavirus pandemic" (NBA to suspend, 2020). Due to the rapidly evolving nature of COVID-19's spread and severity, the league was not ready to commit to a timeline for return. The organization would instead wait and see while observing calls from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to flatten the curve, a phrase utilized to encourage people to keep coronavirus cases under control through practice of social distancing (Thunström et al., 2020).

The NBA and other professional sports leagues suffered great financial losses as a result of the crisis. Ehrich et al. estimated a combined net loss of 6.8 billion dollars in 2020 across the NBA, NFL, MLB and NHL due to regular game disruption throughout the early pandemic (2020). During this hiatus, the topic of racial injustice rose to the forefront of civil dialogue after an African-American man in Minneapolis, Minnesota named George Floyd was killed by a policeman (Dreyer et al., 2020). This incident – combined with previous similar tragedies – sparked a series of protests nationwide calling for racial justice and equity (Powell, 2022). NBA players were among the most vocal of professional athletes in what became a historical period of civil dialogue concerning racism (Woike, 2020). The NBA's break from play continued with no

clear path toward a season return until early June. On June 4, a press release stated that the NBA Board of Governors had approved a competitive format to restart the 2019-20 season with 22 teams. The statement cited a need to finish the season safely and responsibly while also using its platform to address racial violence and injustice in “very real and concrete ways” (NBA Board, 2020). The NBA’s approach reflects insights from 2020’s Edelman Trust Barometer, which underscored the importance of consumers expecting brands to act. Increasing 13 points from 2017 to 2020, 64% of consumers indicated a belief that brands can be a powerful force for change (Edelman, 2020). According to the barometer, employees also expect to be heard – 73% of employees indicated a desire for an opportunity to shape the future of society. Consistent with these findings, the NBA made clear its intention to be a voice for change while empowering its employees (athletes) to shape societal outcomes in both health and safety and social issues.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the NBA’s corporate communications efforts from its initial announcement of the 2019-20 season restart to the actual start date nearly two months later. Utilizing 14 NBA press releases and three video interviews with Commissioner Adam Silver, the study will create a space for analyzing organizational communications framing through a unique lens of both risk communication theory and corporate social advocacy (CSA). The theory of risk communication and CSA have been chosen as foundational bases of framing due to the unconventional confluence of a global health crisis and social unrest. The theoretical frameworks - typically seen as very separate ideas - are intertwined in the NBA’s communication about a potential restart from the outset. The study utilizes a thematic and textual analysis to discuss the league’s communications strategies with these principles in establishing its messaging around the season restart.

Literature Review

Framing

In order to most effectively understand the two main theories that will be examined, it's important to first explore framing, which is a foundational theory upon which risk communication and CSA originate. The public perception of any situation is highly influenced by the organizations who portray them. Framing theory posits that how something is presented to a given audience leads to how that audience will process and retain the information that has been outlined (Entman, 2010). It goes a step further than agenda setting theory, which suggests that outlets set the agenda for which issues are most important to discuss, but not necessarily what to think regarding a particular issue (Shaw, 1979). In contrast, frames (whether intentional or not) can heavily influence a prevailing narrative about an individual, event, or topic.

Framing is often manifest with a tendency to be selective about what elements of a narrative are shared, and can be observed with virtually any topic. As Tuchman put it, framing in communication “organizes everyday reality” (1978, p. 193). It is evident in the choice of press release headlines and the descriptive words surrounding an event, individual, incident, or course of action. Framing has also been characterized as the main idea or storyline that provides meaning to a series of unfolding events (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Frames have a cascading, domino effect on prevailing narratives that become perpetually retold (Morey & Yaqin, 2011).

Organizations are engaged in a near-constant battle with news outlets for how their company is framed (Johansson & Odén, 2017). Due to the competitive nature of the news industry environment, journalists are encouraged at times to include highly descriptive words about situations or people. Doing so can lead to more engagement, but may not always be accurate in the frame being established (“Media Studies,” n.d.). The public relations effort of

companies often aim to combat inaccuracies by maintaining relationships with media members and providing credible materials for journalists to write about (Larsson, 2009). The rise of social media and company-controlled channels, suggest Johansson and Odén (2017), has given corporations a sense of owning the upper hand in relation to journalists.

Research on what makes a strong frame for organizations has been conducted, yielding several crucial identifying factors. Frames that advocate for widely-supported goals are far more likely to gain traction and acceptance (Chong & Wolinsky-Nahmias, 2005). For example, large companies who cited their own action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during the pandemic were more likely to have greater perceptions and customer satisfaction (Liang & Wu, 2021).

Semetko and Valkenburg identify five frames that are used strategically: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility (2000). The conflict frame emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups, and institutions to capture audience interest. While organizations aim to minimize exposure of internal conflict, some media conglomerates employ this frame to generate engagement and facilitate the perceived seriousness or newsworthiness of an event (Burscher et al., 2014).

The frame of human interest relies on human emotion to communicate an issue, event or problem. When audiences hear a genuine, sincere appeal to their emotion, they are more likely to retain interest (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). This element of framing has ancient roots, with description stretching as far back as Aristotle who expounded on the Greek word pathos – a term that meant to “experience,” “undergo,” or “suffer” (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Organizations or businesses who utilize the human interest frame tend to focus on implications for individuals with real stories rather than a corporate entity with no face behind it. A study looking at crisis types found that the more unintentional a crisis, the less attribution of organizational blame and

responsibility befalls the company (Ho Cho & Gower, 2006). When framing information that leads to public attribution of responsibility, companies and media draw upon the human interest frame to effectively change perceptions of what entity needs to be held accountable (Boukes et al., 2015). Another method of framing that understands human interest is gain framing. Gain framing is a type of communication Kahneman and Tversky (1985) call “prospect theory,” which suggests that a loss is perceived as more significant than an equivalent gain. In the context of risk, gain framing can help people see difficult actions or situations in a more favorable light. The priority to discuss what will occur over what will be absent or replaced introduces the psychology of choosing to benefit from something. Human interest can tend to wane when frames are implemented from a loss perspective.

Semetko and Valkenberg’s idea of economic consequences suggest that this frame can play a powerful role in shaping government policy (2000). The frame is used in various campaigns to increase support, including crafting persuasive messages on pro-environmental policies (Bertolotti & Catellani, 2021). If the economic concern is wide enough, it thus has potential for considerable convincing power. The entire foundations of niche news organizations can be built upon this frame because of the near-universal interest in economic outcomes.

Next is morality. This frame puts an event, problem, or issue in the context of societal morals or religious tenets. More than ever before, companies strategically cite the need to do what is right, seeking to promote their actions as contributions to the greater good. The morality frame is where corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate social advocacy (CSA), and corporate social impact (CSI) initiatives are manifest (Uysal & Aksak, 2022).

The final frame of Semetko and Valkenberg’s study is the responsibility frame. This frame presents an issue or problem in such a way that assigns responsibility to an organization or

government other than itself (2000). In natural disasters, frames can assess blame to the weather, infrastructures of a community, or overall preparedness of governmental leaders. Responsibility can also be owned, rather than deflected, as a strategy of framing in hopes to demonstrate accountability and credibility moving forward. An example of this is Wells Fargo's attempt to save its reputation after accusations of unethical conduct in 2017. The CEO framed his statement to the U.S. Senate with a defining blunt assertion: Wells Fargo would "return to ethical conduct" (Amernic & Craig, 2022). The CEO's choice of frame took responsibility rather than deflecting it.

The broad concept of framing has been applied across several research disciplines. It continues to be a heavy topic of discussion in advertising and marketing (Shan et al., 2020). Framing is also enlisted by politicians and media members alike, leading to significant implications for election cycles (Oxley, 2020). Social media uses machine learning and artificial intelligence methods to detect particular frames and then feed content to users with customized algorithms (Lopez-Rabadan, 2022).

Research has affirmed that framing is a key strategic communications method, whether implemented by the media or by an organization itself. While recognizing framing as the macro-idea upon which risk communication and CSA spring forth, it must remain clear that these two theoretical sub-genres of framing will function as the core basis of examination for the study at hand. This decision was due to their distinctive and applicable nature to the chosen material. Risk communication and CSA draw upon framing, but a specific focus on these areas enable novel results based upon more detailed criteria than framing theory permits. The literature review will next demonstrate the origins of these theories and their application in a sports context prior to examining them through the lens of the NBA amid the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Risk Communication

Risk communication is a type of framing and broadly applicable academic discipline. Its origin dates back to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) response to society's lack of transparency regarding toxic substances in the air (Palenchar & Heath, 2007). Poor oversight among private and public sectors led to a series of chemical accidents in the 1980s, bringing several local, state, and federal governments to pass laws and regulations to minimize repeat chances of these disasters (Belke, 2000). Heath and Palenchar describe the EPA's initial definition of risk communication "as a means to open, responsible, informed, reasonable, scientific and value-laden discussion of risks associated with personal health and safety practices involved in living and working in close proximity to harmful activities and toxic substances" (2009). In addition to making risks known, risk communication involves taking appropriate courses of action to lessen perceived risks (Palenchar et al., 2005). The COVID-19 pandemic served as a worldwide wakeup call for better risk communication and community engagement strategies at earlier stages of public health crises (Tambo et al., 2021).

Risk communication involves numerous individuals, including government officials, business and industry leaders, public interest group members, academics, media professionals, and the general public (Kamrin, 2014). Success of risk communication, Kamrin argues, is measured by the degree to which quality educational content has been shared and the extent of behavioral change among audiences (2014). The theory calls for transparency to facilitate participation and ideas from affected communities (Leighton et al., 2002). In 2007, Palenchar and Heath outlined five essential elements of risk communication: ideas and meaning count, transparency, build trust over time through community outreach and collaborative decision making, acknowledge uncertainty in risk assessments, and carry out risk communication as

narrative enactment. The following paragraphs aim to recap these elements of risk communication theory and their function as a credible measuring stick. This foundational study will later be examined as a core piece of the study at hand.

The first element is that ideas and meaning count. Communicators need to understand that their relaying of risk does indeed have an impact on people's health and well-being. Thorough research before a risk is on the horizon allows communicators to hear from several stakeholders to assist in making informed decisions (Palenchar & Heath, 2007). The opinions of trusted officials outside of a communicating organization matter. The "ideas and meaning count" element punctuates the need for companies to perform due diligence in studying out potential scenarios that could occur with the ensuing risk. Doing so, suggest Heath and Palenchar in another study, will keep "a fully functioning risk community...in which risks are known to occur, and this knowledge keeps industry, government, and citizens continually learning what to do during such events" (2000, p. 156). Assertive, research-backed, and confident dialogue furthers faith among communities that correct effort and actions are being carried out well in advance.

The second concept of Heath and Palenchar's five effective risk communication elements is transparency. Transparency is at the heart of consumer trust. It is also manifest through timeliness. Pre-established crisis management systems of communication are critical to approaching situations with confidence in messaging (Woo & Chang, 2019). In a world that expects instantaneous access to quality information, technological infrastructure should be developed to allow stakeholders to unearth information about foreseen risks (Palenchar & Heath, 2007). During the COVID-19 pandemic, health and governmental institutions set the tone with proactive visual tweets embedded with preventative messages regarding spread (Sleigh, 2021).

In less prominent crises than a global pandemic, fewer valid and quick-disseminating sources of risk information exist. Such was the case during a food safety crisis in Ireland (Regan, 2014). In such circumstances, companies must remain transparent and provide consistent updates with risk assessments. The internet's presence makes it increasingly difficult for institutions to get away with propaganda or decision-manipulation regarding risk (Palenchar & Heath, 2007). Visual strategy is also critical to designing transparent, easy-to-understand data. While graphs have been historically recommended as best for transparency, a study examining the effectiveness of tree diagrams, decision trees, bar graphs, and population diagrams concluded that all can be successfully interpreted by general audiences. What matters most in visual presentation of risk communication is clarity (Kurz-Milcke, 2008). One hurdle to transparency is that consumers may not necessarily want additional information (Gower, 2006). When this occurs, companies may not devote resources for creation of materials stakeholders won't appreciate or consume.

Third is building trust over time through community outreach and collaborative decision making. Organizations who include other experts in relation to a forthcoming risk are more likely to increase support. Level of fear decreases when the source has previously established satisfactory trust levels (Renn & Levine, 1991). An essential element of collaborative decision making is to not only involve outside partners, but to make that alliance known to audiences throughout communications efforts.

The fourth element is to acknowledge uncertainty in risk assessments. Uncertainty is uncomfortable, which a concept called uncertainty reduction theory describes (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). An effective risk communicator seeks certainty in all corners where it can be found and is not afraid to be open with the public about what can't be. Organizations may

hesitate because it may appear to lessen legitimacy, which can be true in some cases (Gerlach & Rayner, 1988). It is important, of course, to strike the correct balance of intelligence shared and uncertainty acknowledged.

The last of Palenchar and Heath's risk communication elements is that risk communication is carried out as a narrative enactment. Knowing the common narratives of a group allows a framework for risk communicators to scan, analyze, and identify the viewpoints of stakeholders. Framing interests as those of other groups in a cohesive narrative is important. Consistent narratives lead to better acceptance of one (Heath, 1994). Selection of words is critical.

Risk Communication and Sports. Risk communication has been scarcely examined in the sports industry. One area that risk communication research in sports has touched upon regards the health of athletes competing. This is not centered around external factors that could influence the health of athletes, but instead how the sports events themselves can affect health and well-being. Fuller and Drawer (2004) suggest that risk communication is an effective tool for sports governing bodies to identify preventive and therapeutic interventions for athletes. The National Football League (NFL) has come under scrutiny for the violence of American football, which leads to athlete concussions. This ongoing problem for the NFL has led to a need for risk communication strategies to prevent the public from turning against it. LaGree et al. proposes pre-planned league accident response strategies when a player is injured. Findings indicated that effective risk planning and response strategies that involved fans facilitated more favorable perceptions of the NFL's reputation, while exposure to just media coverage of the NFL's injury created negative perceptions of the NFL's brand (2019).

Prior to the pandemic, very few studies took place regarding mitigation of infectious diseases at sporting events. One in 2014 cited the importance of sports planning organizations referencing the World Health Organization (WHO) and other responsible health agencies to boost legitimacy (Dickman, 2014). Since COVID-19, professional sports organizations have been charged with leading a responsible restoration of civic life. This includes prioritizing health of athletes and keeping sports events in a controlled environment when necessary moving forward (DiFiori et al., 2021). The role of sports organizations as a risk communicator for the public health of society and its athletes has remained largely unexplored.

Corporate Social Advocacy

Corporate social advocacy (CSA) originated from Dodd and Supa to refer to a company's public stance on a contentious social-political issue (2014). CSA is linked with corporate social responsibility (CSR), a concept Coombs and Holladay describe as voluntary actions a company uses to pursue its mission while fulfilling obligations to various stakeholders (2012). CSA goes a step beyond CSR – rather than seeking to appeal to nearly all stakeholders in business operations, CSA practice involves putting reputation on the line to lend a voice to controversial social causes or movements (Hernandez-Blades, 2021). It is not seen without risks, as audiences can perceive a brand as disingenuous or self-serving. Organizations should carefully consider how their stances align with the company's purpose – companies who jump on social bandwagons do not always end up as winners in the public eye. Severe backlash can result if CSA feels forced or opportunistic (Victor, 2017).

CSA is becoming increasingly common among large corporations, with heavily influential companies such as Disney, Amazon, Nike, Google, Ikea, and LinkedIn taking stances on divisive issues (Ripplematch Team, 2023). Issues include gender inequality, gun control,

poverty, health care, immigration, social justice, the LGBTQ+ community, and civil rights (Salazar, 2022). The jury is still out on what subsequent long-term outcomes will follow these companies as a result of their CSA decisions. Research indicates that the effectiveness of influencing consumer stances is much more impactful when an individual's stance was previously undecided (Lee & Chung, 2022). Consumers with existing stances are more likely to either increase brand loyalty or withdraw.

Financial consequences of CSA practice, find Dodd and Supa, have shown to be a mixed bag as difficulty remains in demonstrating direct earnings impact on an organization (2014). Earnings aside, there is a belief among companies that their CSA stances matter greatly because over half of American consumers (63%) look to businesses to take the lead on social and environmental change (Cone, 2017). The same study, however, points out that 76% of consumers have indicated they will refuse to buy a company's products or service if it supports an issue contrary to their beliefs. As time goes on, companies who intend to remain neutral (especially with prominent outward facing employees) find themselves in an increasingly difficult environment (DiStaso & Messner, 2010).

Research concerning consumer-company identification suggests that companies fulfil important self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Winning over consumer identification, or loyalty, is crucial to business function. CSA plays a role in both maximizing identification and reducing it (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2009). CSA is a defining practice of companies who target Millennials and Gen Z individuals, and its implementation has been shown to decrease psychological distance between the consumer and brand among these groups. In other words, companies can more successfully reach and cultivate loyalty with individuals of these generations when they employ social advocacy (Xu et al., 2021).

Corporate Social Advocacy and Sports Organizations. While a multitude of studies have been conducted examining sports organizations and CSR, there is less to be found with CSA. This is to be expected as CSA is a relatively new and emerging area of study. Oca et al. (2022) explored professional sports leagues' progressive commercials and their increase in the aftermath of summer 2020's racial unrest in America. The researchers concluded that while these types of commercials draw awareness to racial issues, they mobilize consumerism, which they posit can propagate some of the very institutional racism a commercial is claiming to stand against.

In the midst of the NBA's 2019-20 bubble restart that included a variety of social justice efforts, some expressed pushback. Former NBA star and prominent TNT analyst Charles Barkley suggested that some of the NBA's CSA efforts to support Black Lives Matter missed the point, seeming trivial rather than implementing real change like police reform and prison reform (Bet, 2020). Commissioner Adam Silver assured that he understood critics of social advocacy who want to watch sports for unity and not controversy (Adam Silver: Social issues, 2020).

While there are viewers who prefer a pure focus on sport rather than combined with societal issues, a recent study has indicated that 73% of sports fans say political commentary is acceptable (Srikanth, 2021). While race and social issues have been discussed, professional sports organizations also demonstrate a commitment to other goals and initiatives that may not fall under the CSA umbrella, like promoting health and wellness among youth (Hills et al., 2019). Those areas of focus are more CSR-centric.

Many sports brands searching to gain presence in the area have looked to Nike as a template for creating a brand identity around efforts to combat social injustice (Waymer & Logan, 2021). Nike's willingness to foray into controversial issues and place divisive athletes at the forefront of their communications strategies has paid financial dividends over the past several

years (The Brand Hopper, n.d.). Brands that have taken longer to jump aboard CSA causes have faced scrutiny. The NFL has been levied criticism for several situations in recent years (Rugg, 2020).

COVID-19 and the NBA

While several studies have examined various elements of the NBA's 2019-20 bubble season restart, very few have looked through a lens of communication. Smith and Casper summarized American professional sports leagues and their CSR initiatives during COVID-19, finding that the NBA used three CSR-focused themes during the pandemic – education, assisting, and inspiration (2020). Another study looked at the NBA's decision-making process in response to COVID-19 through a lens of media coverage. It conducted a qualitative content analysis on NBA media coverage between January 21, 2020 and July 10, 2020, analyzing 152 articles from media outlets. The theoretical framework of bounded rationality and bounded morality guided the researchers to claim that the league's decision-making process shifted with various focuses on health and safety, finances, and competitive advantage (Hindman et al., 2021). A stated limitation of the study was a reliance on media reporting regarding the NBA's decision-making process.

Media framing can alter what organizations seek to emphasize or frame. One study recapped the NBA's internal communications to players preceding the NBA bubble, praising the league's approach to transparency with players. The league provided a 113-page book with guidelines to the 22 participating teams in the bubble, also demonstrating the many health resources in place for testing and monitoring the virus. The model was praised by the researchers as historic (Dove et al., 2020). A study drawing upon framing of risk communication and CSA to

examine a professional sports league's communications strategy in convincing key publics of a responsible and safe season restart has never been previously undertaken.

As CNN's Pepitone put it: "NBA leaders now found themselves facing dual crises: How to safely return to play during a global pandemic while confronting a national reckoning on race?" (2020). In this context of duality, the league faced a unique challenge from a communications perspective. This paper aims to help answer this question and contribute to the field of communications by providing a new lens of examining an organizational sports communication strategy during a public health crisis. Specifically, it attempts to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

RQ1: What strategies of Palenchar and Heath's five essential criteria of risk communication are present in all official NBA statements/Commissioner Silver interviews between June 4, 2020-July 31, 2020 pertaining to the 2019-20 season restart plans?

RQ2: How did official NBA statements/Commissioner Silver interviews frame the NBA's approach to corporate social advocacy between June 4, 2020-July 31, 2020?

Methodology

Drawing upon a theoretical lens of framing, the study uses a qualitative research design, employing textual and thematic analyses to interpret source material. Examining 14 official press releases from the National Basketball Association and three video interviews with NBA Commissioner Adam Silver between June 4, 2020 and July 30, 2020, this research paper assesses the league's strategic communications strategy leading up to the 2019-20 season restart in

Orlando, Florida. Utilization of frames - with a specific focus on usage of strategic risk communication and corporate social advocacy (CSA) - will be assessed from the aforementioned material. To determine what source materials meet criteria for risk communication, content will be assessed with Palenchar and Heath's (2007) five essential criteria of risk communication: ideas and meaning count, transparency, trust built through community outreach and collaborative decision making, uncertainty acknowledgement in risk assessments, and risk communication as narrative enactment. Corporate social advocacy (CSA) will be examined for references to issues facing the African American community in the wake of social unrest, social justice initiatives, and player involvement in these causes. Main themes of CSA were identified and grouped by the researcher due to the lack of a model. Following identification of main themes, specific examples and further justification will take place. Research has shown key processes of CSA to include terms and phrases that reference sustainability, accountability, genuineness, and visibility (Song & Lan, 2022).

Research Design

The qualitative thematic/textual analysis design enabled the study to dive deep into material with human processing and background knowledge that enhanced overall takeaways. The design takes the overall context of issues facing society at the time, knowledge of the climate surrounding COVID-19 safety in the United States, and racial unrest into account. Rather than employing machine textual analysis, familiarity surrounding the culture, history, and personalities of the NBA and its leadership helped main themes to be effectively identified and expounded upon. Key theoretical frameworks are the concepts of risk communication and CSA. Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five strategic frames (mentioned in the literature review) are also taken into account for both concepts.

Sampling & Data Collection

Criteria used for selecting texts and documents is concise. All official press releases were taken from the NBA official archives from first mention of a potential season restart to the day the regular season resumed (June 4-July 30). 24 press releases were issued in the said time period. Material was then examined for any mention of COVID-19 safety precautions or instances of corporate social advocacy. Unrelated NBA communications included new corporate sponsorship alliances and announcements of new hires or retirements. Distinguishing relevant press releases necessitated the need for 10 releases to be set aside, resulting in 14 total NBA statements to be analyzed. Length for each varied, with some being numerous paragraphs with rich descriptions and others as short as a few sentences.

For video content, the study examines all video interviews that NBA Commissioner Adam Silver participated in for the same time period. Any outside media stories with quotes from Silver were excluded, with the purpose of avoiding selective frames from news outlets. Choosing to examine full-length interviews allowed the study to see the entirety of what Silver hoped to convey on behalf of the league, without inclusion or exclusion of any quotes from an interview on a written story. Between June 4, 2020 and July 30, 2020, Silver participated in three broadcast interviews with mainstream media: ESPN's NBA Countdown, Good Morning America, and Sportscenter. Each interview lasted approximately seven minutes, giving 21 minutes worth of examinable material. The sample size is sufficient, providing adequate subject matter and discussion points about the intended messaging of the league and its main spokesperson.

Coding Process

Assembling the included press releases and transcribing the broadcast interviews, the researcher carefully examined all statements, distinguishing what fit under the umbrella of risk communication, described as “as a means to open, responsible, informed, reasonable, scientific and value-laden discussion of risks associated with personal health and safety practices involved in living and working in close proximity to harmful activities and toxic substances” (Heath & Palenchar, 2009). Therefore, any text with mention of COVID-19, health and safety protocols, or infectious disease organizations, programs, and specialists were extracted and grouped under a broad risk communication category. Similarly, any text with mention of CSA was extricated as defined in the literature review: practice of putting reputation on the line to lend a voice to controversial social causes or movements (Hernandez-Blades, 2021). While equal treatment of all should never be considered controversial, critics question the role and extent of corporate involvement pertaining to social justice and racial issues, often citing distrust of motives (Parcha & Kingsley Westerman, 2020). Any item that could be tied to CSA was collected, including mention of racial injustice, the Black community, inequality, representation and inclusion, and marginalized communities. Once these passages were isolated, the study could then dive deeper into what elements of risk communication and CSA were present.

Grouping Themes & Pattern Identification. The next round of coding involved separating passages dealing with risk communication into categorical segments: Palenchar and Heath (2007) five essential criteria of risk communication previously mentioned. After gaining thorough familiarity of what each criteria entailed, the researcher scanned all text dealing with risk communication and divided passages into the five themes, with instances of justification included alongside (see Appendix 1.1). As mentioned, no model was identified for classifying

themes of CSA in a textual or thematic analysis, likely due to the emerging nature of the concept in academic circles. As a result, the study author scanned all text under the CSA category and created themes and sub-themes. After careful examination of themes, four main areas of communication were defined in the NBA's utilization of CSA. The recognized themes were as follows: acknowledgement of recent events/problems present, affirming action, specific examples of lifting the Black community, and emphasizing authenticity. As with risk communication analysis in this phase of data collection, justification for many passages' fit with a given theme occurred (see Appendix 1.1).

To reinforce accuracy and yield additional findings, the researcher engaged in a third and final round of coding. This time, a detailed coding sheet was created for both risk communication and CSA (see Appendix 1.2). Each article was re-examined through the lens of the new coding sheet. In creating the risk communication coding sheet, the researcher added further detail under Palenchar and Heath's (2007) five criteria, adding additional elements from their study for categorizing textual data. For example, one of the five essential elements is transparency. For transparency, six additional descriptions of what constitutes transparency were added for potential categorization. These included "the degree to which organizational actions and decisions are ascertainable and comprehensible by interested parties" (Palenchar & Heath, 2007), a willingness to disclose, demonstration of adherence to and improvement of voluntary protocols and laws, mention of verification standards, no reason to believe information about risk is being limited, and demonstration of acquiring, distributing, and creating knowledge (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Another of the five elements is acknowledging uncertainty in risk assessments. To glean more insight here, the third round of coding included the following additional search indicators: demonstration of balance between overrepresentation of risk and acknowledgement of

uncertainty, avoidance of absolute definitions, and acknowledgement that things may not go as planned. These are just a couple of examples of how this final round of coding enhanced takeaways regarding how the NBA demonstrated risk communication.

For the third round of coding for CSA, the study author took each of the four main themes and made additional elements/examples to demonstrate how passages could fit underneath each theme. For example, under the “acknowledgement of recent events and problems present” theme, the researcher took note to search for any mention of George Floyd, recent protests, or the words/phrases “racial,” “injustice,” “social justice issues,” “tragedy,” or “inequity.” Another avenue to categorize text in this theme was specific mention of the Black community and issues they face. Some of these issues include educational opportunity, poverty, police brutality, racism, economic opportunity, and violence. Another theme was “affirming action.” Added elements under this theme included action-items mentioned to confront racism, stated goals of the season restart, discussion about partnering with advocacy groups, organizations, and players. Additionally, looking for how the platform would be used for social issues while in the bubble and use of words such as “committed,” “commitment,” “conversations,” “impact,” “combat,” “goal,” “using our voices,” “implement,” “change,” “affect change,” “fight,” “plans,” were noted.

Reflexivity and Researcher Bias

The study author holds a B.A. in public relations, perhaps making the ideas and theoretical concepts discussed in the study more familiar. As a male sports fan with a particular interest in the NBA, there remained a natural intrigue for what might be found in the subject material. The article author has tracked the league and its teams for over 15 years and had fixed attention on how the organization would handle COVID-19’s onset. Knowing background details

of athletes on the NBPA (Player's Association) board, other franchises, and previous practices of Commissioner Adam Silver assisted the author in comprehending the significance of the time period for professional sports and the drastic actions the NBA took to ensure safety and shift its typically rigid timeline of regular events.

As a follower of the NBA and the game of basketball, the author acknowledges that this could create potential bias in how the study portrays the league and its actions. While expertise in the area is believed to enrich understanding, coding measures aimed to remain objective and drew upon supporting material for implementation and overall assessment.

The following list is the press releases and video interviews that will be analyzed:

- [NBA Board of Governors approves competitive format to restart 2019-20 season with 22 teams returning to play](#) (June 4)
- [NBA and NBPA advance talks on social justice efforts](#) (June 24)
- [NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results](#) (June 26)
- [NBA and NBPA finalize comprehensive plan for July 30 restart to 2019-20 season](#) (June 26)
- [NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results](#) (July 2)
- [NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results](#) (July 13)
- [NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results](#) (July 20)
- [Michelob Ultra toasts the joy of the season's return as the new official beer partner of the NBA](#) (July 23)
- [NBA names Oris Stuart Chief People and Inclusion Officer](#) (July 23)
- [NBA to unveil unique in-venue and broadcast enhancements for 2019-20 season restart](#) (July 24)
- [Antetokounmpo, Dončić, Embiid, Gobert, Jokić, Sabonis, Siakam and Simmons headline global reach of 2019-20 NBA season restart](#) (July 29)
- [NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results](#) (July 29)
- [NBA extends community testing program as part of 2019-20 season restart in Orlando](#) (July 29)
- [Enhancements to sideline border, team benches and officials' whistles among new elements for 2019-20 NBA season restart](#) (July 30)

Adam Silver Video Interviews:

- [NBA Countdown](#) (7:08, July 25)
- [Good Morning America](#) (6:44, July 29)
- [Sportscenter](#) (6:55, June 15)

Findings

Risk Communication

Following analysis, it became evident that the NBA demonstrated risk communication in numerous ways, with Palenchar and Heath's (2007) "transparency" and "building trust over time through community outreach and collaborative decision making" the most prominent of the five essential criteria examined. From the first press release to mention the 2019-20 season restart, a clear emphasis was placed to demonstrate that the league aimed to take a collaborative approach. In the first release, titled "NBA Board of Governors approves competitive format to restart 2019-20 season with 22 teams returning to play," the statement said: "the NBA and the NBPA are working with infectious disease specialists, public health experts and government officials" (NBA Board, 2020). The following portion of the paper will detail the extent to which the NBA fulfilled Palenchar and Heath's (2007) five criteria, justifying why particular practices belong in the category.

Ideas and Meaning Count. Considered broadly, "ideas and meaning count" takes into account that the risk-generating organization is intentional and proactive about what its practices will be (Palenchar & Heath, 2007). Effective practice often puts forth evidence of research prior to actions being carried out, discussion of worst-case scenarios, improving perception that the industry is a positive economic/community force, demonstration of risk transparency, and proactive dialogue. Upon coding, it became clear that the NBA drew upon proactive dialogue in many instances, getting ahead of the curve to show the general public the level of detail and attention that had gone into safe health practices. The league referred to "protocol" or "protocols" in each of the first four press releases to discuss health and safety practices. Affirmative wording — such as "strict," "will remain in self isolation," "stringent," "rigorous,"

“reinforce our commitment,” and “extraordinary precautions” — was used. Entering the bubble, many ideas were posited by the media, fans, and even players about what should be acceptable levels of precautions (Papke, 2020). With early clarity about regular player testing, that positive tests would necessitate self-isolation until cleared by physicians, and that no fans would be physically present, the NBA exhibited seriousness regarding the circumstances.

The league also utilized an additive approach in its proactive messaging. Rather than its communication focus exclusively on what was restricted for players and staffers with “stringent protocols,” the NBA unveiled what it called “unique in-venue and broadcast enhancements,” providing fans “the feeling of sitting next to one another at a live game without leaving the comfort and safety of their homes, while players experience their energy and support in-venue” (NBA to unveil, 2020). This additive method of communication stretches back to the idea of gain framing mentioned in the literature review, suggesting that stakeholders are much more likely to see a circumstance as more interesting or beneficial when presented as a gain (Kahneman & Tversky, 1985). As part of the experience, 300 fans could win a chance to appear live on 17-foot video boards surrounding the courts during games. While reminding fans beforehand that they wouldn’t be physically present, the NBA chose to focus on opportunities for involvement, arguing that the experience would be improved, not diminished.

As mentioned, another area Palenchar and Heath (2007) cited as an element of “ideas and meaning count” is evidence of formative research prior to implementing a risk communication campaign. Examples of prior research to justify actions occurred. For example, in one of Commissioner Adam Silver’s interviews, he talked about the high COVID-19 case rate in Florida (the site of the season restart) while also discussing a current issue with the virus and the Miami Marlins Major League Baseball team, stating that “it’s something we continue to track

very, very closely” (Good Morning America, 2020). Another press release that detailed community testing affirmed that “the league is continuing its support of scientific research” (NBA extends, 2020).

To assert itself as a positive community force, the league shared on July 29 that “NBA and WNBA players, legends and coaches have filmed more than 45 PSAs to share support and tips for reducing risk and staying healthy, including recent messages about the importance of wearing face coverings, hand washing and physical distancing following the recent surge of cases across the country” (Antetokounmpo, 2020). The press release continued by affirming the association’s support of other academic and industry partners on testing that “could provide models for businesses reopening safely,” positioning itself as an example for other businesses to responsibly emulate in the midst of the pandemic. This underscored the idea of the league as a trailblazer into unknown territory for others to follow.

In sum, the NBA demonstrated proactive dialogue, an additive approach while describing safety practices, formative research prior to implementation of policies, and community impact. Identifying instances of these areas being fulfilled provides evidence that the league wanted their ideas and meaning to count, helping media and key publics understand its vision with proactive dialogue. As will be discussed in the next section, the risk communication criteria of “transparency” was prevalent. A crucial part of transparency was the league’s decision to make public weekly testing data available after players had entered the Orlando campus. Throughout these regular releases, the NBA used proactive words such as “isolation” and “quarantine” when describing what would happen after a positive test.

Transparency. Upon examination, the NBA showed several elements of Palenchar and Heath’s (2007) suggested areas of transparency. One was a demonstration of adherence to and

improvement of voluntary protocols and laws. For example, the NBA emphasized that it would be establishing a rigorous program to help “mitigate the risk related to COVID-19,” which included testing and reference of safety practices (NBA Board, 2020). It also gave the specific total of players participating in the bubble and the amount that tested positive for the coronavirus weekly. In addition to reporting player health status, the comprehensive total of staffers and their positive tests were released as well (NBA and NBPA announce, 2020, July 2). This remained for the entirety of the bubble experience. Over the course of the final week before the regular season, the NBA announced that zero had returned a positive test (NBA and NBPA announce, 2020, July 29).

To keep the number of on-site reporters limited and enable adherence to strict CDC guidelines for the general public, the NBA provided off-site media with access to virtual media availability sessions and footage from team practices (Ebbs & Salzman, 2020). A press release devoted to showing the NBA’s commitment to transparency and creating its own governing protocols and laws was entitled “Enhancements to sideline border, team benches and officials’ whistles among new elements for 2019-20 NBA season restart.” Here, a comprehensive rundown of plans for in-game health protocols were detailed, including changes to sideline borders, team benches, timeouts, official whistles, replay officials, injury reporting procedures, baseline positioning, scorer’s tables, and coach attire (2020).

For example, team benches were divided into multiple rows (three sections) of seats, “with appropriate distance between each seat” (Enhancements to sideline, 2020). One of the concerns entering the bubble was the health of older staff members, especially regarding older head coaches (Maloney, 2020). The attention to detail in bench spacing could have been a response to those fears as the NBA also stated that the coaches and team staff sections would be

“slightly separated from the players section,” even going so far as to communicate that “the unassigned seats are promptly cleaned and disinfected after each use” on team benches (Enhancements to sideline, 2020). Movable chairs for timeout huddles, cloth covering on referee whistles, off-site replay officials, off-court photography, and plexiglass-surrounded scorer’s tables were described. Plexiglass was a proven and widespread COVID-19 precautionary practice at the time (Dhanak et al., 2022). In addition, injury reporting procedures were tightened from regular practice, necessitating the need for specific illnesses to be listed to the media before game tip-offs. The NBA chose to brand all of these adjustments as new elements and enhancements (Enhancements to sideline, 2020). Following Palenchar and Heath’s (2007) description, the press release set up voluntary protocols.

Another area of transparency the researcher coded for is a willingness to disclose, even when disclosure of potentially damaging information isn’t necessarily required. For instance, in the brief July 2 release about COVID-19 test results, a statement said “twenty-five of 351 players have tested positive since testing began on June 23” (NBA and NBPA announce, 2020). This was added after the weekly total had already been stated. A willingness to share vulnerable information also came from Commissioner Adam Silver in his broadcast interviews. For example, on NBA Countdown, he said: “if the case rate on our campus became anything like what it is off-campus, we would shut down immediately. We have a whole bunch of contingencies...There’s no specific number, but again, if we see any sort of significant spread whatsoever, it will be a health decision and won’t be a business decision to shut down” (ESPN, 2020). Silver said this on more than one occasion. Skeptical observers could have used this as reason to fuel pessimism. Cohee and Barnhart (2023) found that this open dialogue about the fragile nature of the restart is not always conventional for business leaders in the midst of

uncertainty. Leaders often seek to affirm certainty in the midst of doubt, but doing so would have violated the principle of transparency in risk communication.

Silver was also transparent that the season restart may not be for everyone, iterating on a SportsCenter appearance that “if a player chooses not to come, it’s not a breach of his contract. We accept that” (ESPN, 2020). In the same interview, he remained clear concerning on-site employees, reminding the public that they “will be going in and out of the campus, but they won’t be in the same room with players.” He talked of how they will be breathing the same air, but that there would be precautions. One of those precautions - “if we do get a positive test, we’ll be very specifically tracing exactly what context those people had” (ESPN, 2020), showing that contact tracing was not just restricted to player cases. This is another example of willingness to disclose information where it wasn’t required.

Commissioner Silver assisted in organizational actions and decisions being ascertainable and comprehensible during his interview on SportsCenter on June 15. There, he detailed physical distancing, mask wearing by employees, and daily testing, stating that it would be one of the best safeguards. He also said that “the only time [players] are not wearing masks is when they’re actually playing basketball” (ESPN, 2020). The June 26 edition of the league’s weekly COVID-19 test results press release asserted that “any player who tested positive will remain in self-isolation until he satisfies public health protocols for discontinuing isolation and has been cleared by a physician” (NBA and NBPA announce, 2020). In the June 26 statement entitled “NBA and NBPA finalize comprehensive plan for July 30 restart to 2019-20 season,” the NBA specified that the Walt Disney World Resort would be a “single-site campus” (2020), communicating that travel would not be involved in this rendition of NBA basketball. An element of transparency

includes clarity about which partnerships are taking place, which will be detailed in the next of Palenchar and Heath's (2007) five essential criteria of risk communication.

Building Trust through Community Outreach & Collaborative Decision-Making.

Palenchar and Heath (2007) posit that trust is ultimately demonstrated in word and deed. The deed portion of this promise is further strengthened with evidence of credible collaboration. As discussed in the introductory portion of the findings, the NBA made clear from its first statement pertaining to the season restart that it would be partnering with various organizations, listing "infectious disease specialists, public health experts and government officials" (NBA Board, 2020). The initial statement wrapped up with affirmation that the league was hopeful to finish the season in a "safe and responsible manner based on strict protocols...with public health officials and medical experts."

Mention of partnerships in discussion of safety plans occurred frequently, but perhaps none more than the alliance with the NBPA (National Basketball Player's Association) and involvement of players themselves. The comprehensive plan regarding the season restart began by stating that "the NBA and the NBPA confirmed today an agreement on health and safety protocols," in addition to a quote from Michele Roberts (then Executive Director of the NBPA) that "it has taken true collaboration between the League and the Union" (NBA and NBPA finalize, 2020). Each weekly press release that detailed COVID-19 test results were titled "NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results." By discussion of the players, the league could have been aiming to show that the decision to resume play involved its own athletes and was not mandated from the top down. As mentioned, the 45 PSA's about COVID-19 safety that were distributed to the community occurred with "NBA players, legends and coaches" (Antetokounmpo, 2020). These messages generated more than 65 million views.

In the article detailing in-game protocols, a statement from League Operations President Byron Spruell reiterated that “new elements implemented for the season restart reflect a collaboration among the league, players, coaches, referees and team staff, and underscore a willingness by all parties to adapt to a challenging environment” (Enhancements to sideline, 2020). On broadcast interviews, Silver talked of how he worked very closely with the Players Association and team entities. During Silver’s June 15 interview on Sportscenter, he said that “our conversations have been with the Players Association and their leadership over the past several months” (ESPN, 2020). A unified front appeared to be important to the league in its communications as the following phrase “the NBA and NBPA have agreed” or similar wording appeared numerous times.

Given that roughly 375 players went to Orlando, some did not initially agree about the extent of precautions or viability of the approach (France24 Staff, 2020). Even Silver said on Sportscenter that “we’re dealing with a Players Association representing 450 guys for 22 teams...not surprisingly, there’s not a uniform view among those players” (ESPN, 2020). The NBA’s careful inclusion of its partnership with the Players Association may have served as a preemptive method to combat a potential media narrative of forceful participation. Involving the Players Association could have been a significant factor to successfully provide adequate agreement among all parties, curbing a possible mutiny on its hands regarding safety policies when the games began. As will be discussed further in the study’s section on corporate social advocacy, partnership with players proved integral to the season restart’s continuation. Silver also ensured to say words like “we” and “our” in describing precautionary measures on each of the three TV interviews analyzed.

Continuing with collaboration, several examples of reputable health organizations were referenced. For instance, specific health-based entities were cited as partners throughout, like Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), BioReference Laboratories, Yale School of Public Health, Mayo Clinic, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and The Fight Is In Us. Not only were these entities explicitly alluded to, but communication about adherence to their practices took place as well. For example, in July 13's press release on the week's COVID-19 test results, it discussed that players who tested positive would remain "in their home markets...until they are cleared under CDC guidelines and NBA rules for leaving home isolation" (NBA and NBPA announce, 2020). In "NBA extends community testing program as part of 2019-20 season restart in Orlando," the NBA also voiced its support of expanded testing access in partnership with the Yale School of Public Health, which focused on obtaining FDA approval for a non-invasive saliva test to use (2020). Perhaps Ropeik and Gray's (2002) mindset was kept in mind by the league office when listing several other corporations: people are usually less afraid of risks that come from places, people, corporations, or other organizations that they trust, and are more afraid if the risk comes from a source they don't trust.

Other, more generic references to COVID-19 medical experts included infectious disease specialists, public health experts, public health officials, government officials, panels of expert scientists, and doctors. Lending credit to others, Silver thanked "the public health officials and infectious disease specialists who helped guide the creation of comprehensive medical protocols and protections" (NBA and NBPA finalize, 2020). In "NBA extends community testing program as part of 2019-20 season restart in Orlando," several action-items with these groups were listed to assist in community efforts to fight the virus. For example, the NBA provided free, daily COVID-19 PCR tests at a mobile collection site near the Orlando campus (2020). It supported

“multiple other academic industry partners” on pooled testing, hosted pop-up testing, and encouraged COVID-19 “survivors to donate plasma for virus research” (NBA extends, 2020). These partnerships were assured to be ongoing throughout the process of the season restart, not just leading up to resuming play. Silver affirmed on NBA Countdown that a panel of expert scientists and doctors “are reviewing the data on a regular basis and have modeled this with us” (ESPN, 2020).

The NBA also cited partnerships with non health-related institutions in the practice of protocols, as Michelob Ultra was named a sponsor of the virtual fan experience mentioned earlier that served as a way to virtually involve fans in a risk-free manner (Michelob, 2020). Microsoft was another, with its involvement in displaying customized viewing options on NBA League Pass and NBA TV (NBA to unveil, 2020). These viewing options were specifically expanded to compensate for no in-person fan attendance as part of safety protocols. Silver directly referred to Disney as a partner, expressing in a written statement that “we are grateful to our longtime collaborator Disney for its role in playing host and making this return to play possible” (NBA and NBPA finalize, 2020).

As part of a July 29 statement, the league alluded to NBA Together, which it described as “the league’s global community and social engagement campaign that aims to support, engage, educate and inspire youth, families and fans in response to the coronavirus pandemic” (NBA extends, 2020). The initiative launched about a week after the March stoppage of play, committing to raise more than 50 million in support of people affected by the coronavirus worldwide. NBA Together’s initial announcement also linked to a website called “Coronavirus Information for NBA Fans,” which provided daily updates throughout the pandemic with information on regional COVID-19 outbreaks, guidance from the CDC, World Health

Organization (WHO), former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, and other health experts. Promoting NBA Together also aimed to inspire one million “Acts of Caring,” encouraging players, fans, and the general public to share how they supported friends and families with the hashtag #NBATogether. Palenchar and Heath (2007) emphasize that organizations who use community outreach to achieve reasonable health and safety levels can raise more support for the industry.

Acknowledging Uncertainty. While not as prevalent as the previous two criteria of risk communication, instances of NBA communication in acknowledgement of uncertainty were also present. Palenchar and Heath propose that the said criteria is fulfilled when there is a simultaneous demonstration of balance between avoiding overrepresentation of risk and acknowledging uncertainty. Effective practice concedes that plans may not go as hoped while also straying away from absolute definitions in the midst of unclear outcomes. After data analysis, a common thread was manifested in the form of inserted press release quotes or Commissioner Silver’s broadcast interviews. Rarely, if ever, was acknowledgement of uncertainty found in press release portions that weren’t directly quoting leadership statements. In the first article analyzed, a statement by Adam Silver reads that “while the COVID-19 pandemic presents formidable challenges, we are hopeful of finishing the season in a safe and responsible manner” (NBA Board, 2020). The initial statement serves as a pattern for the league’s careful approach to the road ahead. Balancing risk representation and adequate uncertainty admittance, the simple sentence acknowledges formidable challenges while affirming hope in its protocols.

In a July 24 article, NBA Head of Next Gen Telecast Sara Zuckert detailed aforementioned plans for fans to virtually watch games, citing “unique and challenging

circumstances” (NBA to unveil, 2020). This followed the jargon of many companies at the time (Shulman et al., 2021).

Next is a series of statements from Commissioner Silver. In a July 25 interview on NBA Countdown (less than a week before the season resumed), Silver disclosed that “there was a point where it wasn’t clear we would continue on our track” (ESPN, 2020). In response to news that the most recent week had yielded zero positive tests, he felt like “a coach who was 5-0 in November and wanted to make sure that we didn’t become complacent...we’re thrilled that we’ve had no positives among anyone on that campus. At the same time, I am worried that people might think ‘well, great, no positives. We can let our guard down a little bit. Maybe we don’t need to wear a mask, maybe we don’t have to remain physically distant when we’re not on the court.’ My reaction was thrilled, but let’s just double down and keep continuing to enforce those protocols that got us to zero cases so far” (ESPN, 2020). The sentiment again reflects Palenchar and Heath’s (2007) criteria of acknowledging that things may not go as planned. Perhaps showing the general public his apprehension could be priming audiences for a potential cancellation.

On July 29, Silver avoided use of absolute definitions, stating that “it’s not an exact science because nobody’s ever done this before” (Good Morning America, 2020). Later in the interview, he described himself as anxious, but that there was confidence in the protocol designed, stating that “we think we have a plan in place that should work.” Saying “we think” and “should” could be acknowledging uncertainty while not overrepresenting or inflating the risks involved. Putting context to the situation, Silver said the following on Sportscenter: “it’s not an ideal situation where we’re trying to find a way to our own normal in the middle of a pandemic. It’s in the middle of essentially a recession, or worse, with 40 million unemployed and

now with enormous social unrest in the country” (ESPN, 2020). This avoids absolute definitions and shows effort to acknowledge the very real crisis impacting society. In closing, he said that “we’re dealing with extraordinary circumstances...and we’re trying to do what has never been done before.”

Uncertainty acknowledgement was exclusively manifest from direct quotes by leadership, particularly Silver. He simultaneously expressed the precariousness of the situation while affirming confidence. The word “challenges” was used numerous times when describing COVID-19, and Silver avoided making the plan sound like it was a done-deal. Cautious optimism could be a way to describe communication in this area, with transparency that plans could possibly be torpedoed. Perhaps summing it up best is how Silver used the word “if” on Sportscenter when he said “if we’re able to pull this off” (ESPN, 2020).

Narrative Enactment. Lastly, Palenchar and Heath (2007) asserted that risk communication is carried out as narrative enactment. This is present where companies tend to speak as individuals, sharing thoughts and perspectives on a range of issues. It is also found when corporations speak about other issues - aside from risk - to establish an organization’s place in society. Finally, it is evident in storytelling.

Albeit more scarce, the most utilized form of narrative enactment came from the league’s apparent desire to cultivate a narrative of involving fans despite the limitations of the pandemic. In a July 23 release, the NBA stated that its partnership with Michelob Ultra would be “bringing fans closer to the game,” providing “special access” digitally (Michelob, 2020). The next day, the NBA discussed more than 30 cameras bringing “never-before-seen camera angles” (NBA to unveil, 2020) that would otherwise be impossible with fans present. Virtual cheering through the NBA and a variety of social media implementation (Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, etc.) was

detailed. The narrative of increased fan involvement could have been important to the league due to possible fears of apathy with no in-game energy from fans. Later, a July 29 release about the international diversity of players in the bubble returned to this narrative, citing “a whole new game with a more connected and immersive experience for fans” (Antetokounmpo, 2020).

Silver affirmed the NBA’s place in society concerning safety, acknowledging on Good Morning America that “as we’ve always pointed out, it’s about relative safety at this point when you look at the high case rates, not just in Florida, but around the country” (2020). Silver reiterated the league’s view concerning its own influence, saying that “it’s more a sense from the entire NBA community that we have an obligation to try this because the alternative is to stay on the sidelines...in essence, give in to this virus. While on one hand, this won’t be forever and we will ultimately find a vaccine...we feel this is what this is what we do. We put on NBA basketball. We think that for the country, it’ll be a respite from enormous difficulties people are dealing with in their lives right now” (ESPN, 2020). Palenchar and Heath (2007) spoke about the organization’s place in society, and this statement helps illustrate that. Here Silver revealed how he may view the NBA as whole: a way to provide respite and enjoyment to people.

In summary, narrative enactment criteria was met with emphasis on fan involvement, overall safety for all involved, and the NBA’s place in society to set an example of safe practices and provide respite. As discussed, narrative enactment involves speaking about more than risk practices and scenarios. And, of course, the NBA and its players shared its thoughts and perspectives to great detail regarding social justice and racial issues in America. The next portion of findings will break down what narrative textual themes of corporate social advocacy were manifest in the league’s strong emphasis on using its platform to address racism.

Corporate Social Advocacy

Although present throughout, risk communication narratives did not hold exclusive rights to the unique nature of the NBA's communication leading up to the season restart. A clear focus on social justice issues - particularly racial equity - was manifest in many of the same press releases that affirmed commitment to health and safety measures. As will be expanded upon, messaging that drew attention to George Floyd's death and other social issues reflected many players' strong desire to use the platform for change (Andrews & Spears, 2020). In a spirit of collaboration, the league followed advocacy of players for the organization to brand itself in such a way that exhibited a stance on these issues. Press release analysis yielded various themes on the NBA's stance and initiatives regarding social justice while also being interwoven with aforementioned health and safety protocols. The researcher found these major themes emerge: acknowledgement of recent events/problems present, affirming action, specific examples of lifting the Black community, and emphasizing authenticity.

Acknowledgement of Recent Events/Problems Present. Upon coding, the study author first found many examples of words and phrases such as "racial," "injustice," "social justice issues," "tragedy," "inequity," and "racial inequities in our society." The NBA directly mentioned the murder of George Floyd and recent protests. In the first press release, Commissioner Silver detailed plans to resume play in a safe and responsible manner, followed by immediately affirming that "we also recognize that as we prepare to resume play, our society is reeling from recent tragedies of racial violence and injustice" (NBA Board, 2020). Silver's thoughts on July 29 regarding George Floyd's death represented many players' concerns, stating that "the NBA is roughly 80 percent black...these are issues - in terms of racial inequities in our society - that are near and dear to their heart" (Good Morning America, 2020).

The NBA acknowledged existing societal problems numerous times over the two-month period of analysis. Chris Paul, president of the NBPA, stated that “the issues of systemic racism and police brutality in our country need to end” (NBA and NBPA advance, 2020). Silver said on NBA Countdown that he, Michele Roberts, Chris Paul, and other players had racial justice on their mind while making plans for the restart, specifically stating on NBA Countdown that “the George Floyd tragedy happened in the middle of our planning process” (ESPN, 2020). He continued that “there was a point where it wasn’t clear we would continue on our track. Not because of COVID, but because of social unrest around George Floyd’s murder” (ESPN, 2020). This reveals that Silver may not have always considered COVID-19 the greatest hurdle. Later, just one day before regular season games resumed on July 29, Silver again acknowledged Floyd by name and the racial inequities of society on Good Morning America. There, he repeated that the season restart almost didn’t occur because of “the turmoil and how emotional people were around the league and around the country” (2020). On Sportscenter, Silver referred to “enormous social unrest in the country” (ESPN, 2020). Specific mention of challenges people of color face came on July 29 as the league stated that public health data showed that COVID-19’s impact is most concentrated in “historically marginalized communities of color where access to testing is scarce” (NBA extends, 2020).

Ultimately, acknowledgement of recent events and societal problems was apparent by directly referring to George Floyd’s murder, social unrest, the role of these problems in shaping the season restart, and specific challenges people of color face.

Affirming Action. Affirming action proved to be closely linked with and oftentimes directly placed after acknowledgement of societal issues. Wording of affirmation to confront racism, inequities, or issues was present. In “NBA Board of Governors approves competitive

format to restart 2019-20 season with 22 teams returning to play,” Silver said that “we will continue to work closely with our teams and players to use our collective resources and influence to address these issues in very real and concrete ways” (2020).

For context, many players voiced frustration that these real and concrete outcomes weren’t occurring in society at large. Furthermore, nearly a month into the season restart, another instance of a white policeman shooting a black man (Barrett, 2021) led numerous players to nearly quit the season reboot, protesting first round playoff games over frustration due to lack of concrete change. Speaking of the situation, then-Indiana Pacers guard Victor Oladipo said, “people are dying. This is not okay. We have to keep doing our part until change really comes” (Society has to change, 2020). Oladipo was among many NBA players and stars at the time, including LeBron James, to voice their discontent with police treatment of Black individuals (O’Donnell, 2020).

Examples of affirming action included mention to support players’ activism and leadership. Perhaps the most numerous examples came from a June 24 press release focused exclusively on social justice plans. There, the league stated that the NBA and NBPA “agreed in principle that the goal of the season restart in Orlando will be to take collective action to combat systemic racism and promote social justice” (NBA and NBPA advance, 2020). Chris Paul stated that it was the players’ and league’s duty to “use our collective platform to both put a spotlight on those issues and work to effect change,” later reiterating the goal to “bring about real, long-lasting change to our society” (NBA and NBPA advance, 2020). Silver voiced his unity, echoing Paul that the shared goal will be to bring attention to these issues of social justice, thanking players for their leadership toward creating meaningful and long-term change.

The release cited in-house partnerships for these plans between the league and players, mentioning Paul, Roberts, NBA Deputy Commissioner and COO Mark Tatum, NBA Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer Oris Stuart, and NBPA First Vice President Andre Iguodala to “further advance the league’s collective response” (NBA and NBPA advance, 2020). Part of what could be seen as further support included affirmation of “broad alignment about the direction and priorities of the players, especially with regard to supporting players’ activism and leadership.” Wording in this press release included being “committed to fostering an environment that encourages candid conversations between players and league and team leadership” and finding “tangible” and “sustainable” ways to address racial inequality in America. Silver expressed confidence in these goals, concluding that the league and players were “uniquely positioned to have a direct impact on combatting systemic racism in our country,” once again affirming commitment to collective action in building “a more equal and just society.”

Further public support of players in action plans came from Silver in his NBA Countdown interview. There, he referenced intense discussions with the players association about how they could come together and commit resources, stating that “we should be using this platform to deal with social justice” (ESPN, 2020). On Good Morning America, he discussed how players would be wearing messages on their jerseys related to equality, and that Black Lives Matter would be displayed on the courts (2020). As was the case in the collaborative approach for COVID-19 precautions, he used the word “we” numerous times in broadcast interviews on the subject.

Repetition was a theme in affirming action. In a June 26 press release detailing the final comprehensive plan for the restart just two days later, communication focused on informed and

sustained commitment and how conversations around confronting racism would continue. Michele Roberts alluded to specific plans in Orlando and “long-term initiatives to bring about real change” (NBA and NBPA finalize, 2020). Once again, the wording of “real change” is present. Like a June 24 statement just two days prior, the release again states a “goal of taking collective action to combat systemic racism and promote social justice.” Key publics were reminded that “the goal will be to find tangible and sustainable ways” to address racial inequality. Partnership between players and the organization was mentioned again and the word “address” when referring to systemic racism was used twice in discussion of the season goal.

In the release “NBA names Oris Stuart Chief People and Inclusion Officer” (2020), the NBA outlines his role in ensuring diverse talent. Action words and phrases included “strategies,” “strengthen,” “commitments,” “attract” “retain,” “develop,” “engage,” “establish,” “expand,” “increase representation of people of color,” “enable,” and “empower.” As part of helping identify communities most in need of coronavirus testing, the league partnered with civil rights organizations UnidosUS and the National Urban League to provide access to no-cost testing programs.

In sum, Silver may have seen this as a unique opportunity for players to draw attention to these issues. As he said on Sportscenter, “the world’s attention will be on the NBA in Orlando, Florida if we’re able to pull this off” (ESPN, 2020). The NBA demonstrated its affirmation of action by stating that the goal of the restart would be to draw attention to these issues, support player action, provide stated outcomes, and outline in-house partnerships of player and league leadership.

Specific Examples of Lifting the Black Community. While acknowledging plans and commitment to action was one step, communicating additional specific plans added credence to

the previously stated goals of addressing and drawing attention to these issues. The researcher found several examples of ways the NBA planned to assist the Black community. Across three statements and two interviews from Silver, these specific plans to assist the Black community took shape in the form of the following words and phrases: “representation,” “inclusion,” “expand,” “educational and economic development opportunities,” “economic empowerment,” and “foundation.”

First, on June 24, the NBA revealed conversations with the NBPA had encompassed strategies to “increase Black representation across the NBA and its teams, ensure greater inclusion of Black-owned and operated businesses across NBA business activities, and form an NBA foundation to expand educational and economic development opportunities across the Black community” (NBA and NBPA advance, 2020). Just two days later, the statement on the comprehensive restart plan reaffirmed the aforementioned quote with verbatim wording (NBA and NBPA finalize, 2020).

On July 23, the NBA’s announcement of a new Chief People and Inclusion Officer stated that he would “focus on people, culture, inclusion and innovation” to “establish policies and expand programs to increase the representation of people of color and women in leadership roles and positions across the league” (NBA names, 2020). The statement could have been a way of demonstrating to players and the public that real change was taking place; these affirmations of action were not empty words, but a focused effort to provide specific plans. The timing of the news perhaps served to demonstrate an internal (not just in public writing) seriousness regarding the issue. On NBA Countdown, Silver revealed another specific area of emphasis, stating that “one of the areas in particular that our league is going to focus on together with the Players’ Association is economic empowerment,” adding that “I’m really pushing for change particularly

around economic opportunities” for the Black community (ESPN, 2020). Here, Silver’s dialogue gave a specific example of how he wants to exclusively aid the Black community. Part of why he emphasized this point may have been to show that the league’s goal to influence change in real and concrete ways was not just corporate speak: he personally had determination with a particular goal.

On ABC News, Silver gave another specific reference to how the Black community would be aided. He said, “we’re working collectively with 30 NBA teams on a foundation dedicated to economic empowerment, specifically focused on Black Americans” (Good Morning America, 2020). This connected to his prior comments less than a week earlier about how he pushed for economic empowerment. The comment adds further detail to his push for change and speaks to a unified front with “30 NBA teams.” While statements that fell under the affirming action category were more broad in their advocacy for change, dialogue similar to what Silver affirmed was more specific and directed towards the Black community. Of note - after showing how the league affirmed action for the need for societal change, the researcher has demonstrated ways in which the NBA went into greater detail about specific outcomes. However, these stated outcomes were not further expanded upon by the league in the period of analysis beyond what has been written in this section.

Specific examples of lifting the Black community were manifest with a focus on representation, inclusion, and economic empowerment. This was further demonstrated by plans to utilize Black-owned businesses, collaborate with each team for economic empowerment, and increase educational and economic opportunities through foundations.

Emphasizing Authenticity. The researcher took note of efforts to show that the league’s involvement in these social justice causes were authentic and related to the brand. Research has

suggested the necessity of advocating for authentic causes in CSA practice. Lim and Young (2021) found that perceived brand-fit is positively associated with corporate reputation, adding that perceived authenticity is the strongest predictor for corporate reputation. Furthermore, a company's authentic signaling of an issue can lead to brand loyalty and positive consumer relationships (Park & Jiang, 2020).

First, the NBA's mention of the word "platform" was often tied with a duty to speak out. For example, Silver put it this way on NBA Countdown: "there's a collective view that we should be using this platform to help effect change" (ESPN, 2020). The need to use its "platform" could be perceived as evidence that the NBA was not solely interested in its business ventures and basketball plans. The platform appears to have engendered a duty that the organization "should" speak out.

The league may be trying to show that it is consistent and has previously been committed to social justice issues in its July 13 release on the hiring of new Chief People and Inclusion Officer Oris Stuart. In addition to what has been discussed regarding the statement, it talks about how he would continue to lead the NBA's Global Inclusion Council and efforts to grow the league's Black, women, and diverse-owned suppliers. The word "continue" implies that this has already been taking place. Silver's included quote affirmed that Stuart had made an "impact on our leagues and teams over the past five years...driving inclusion at every level of our organization" (NBA names, 2020). It then put forth his concurrent roles on the Board of Directors for the National Black MBA Association and his participation with a national organization that empowers African-American corporate leaders.

On NBA Countdown, Silver spoke to the NBA's prior long-term investment in social justice, stating that "images, logos on courts, jerseys, messages - all those things are important.

But I think even more importantly is the long-term commitment that, for me has been in the DNA of this league long before I got here in terms of social justice” (ESPN, 2020). He continued by mentioning the makeup of the league: “we have some of the best-known black men in the NBA, some of the best-known black women in the world who play in the WNBA.” In another interview, Silver talked of early players and their activism over the years, affirming that “this has been a part of the league forever” (Good Morning America, 2020). Backing the players’ desire to discuss racial reform, he continued that “these are issues... that are near and dear to their heart.” He spoke of Bill Russell, the 80% makeup of black players in the league once again, and how “it’s been a party of our history. I think of it as part of the DNA of this league.”

In summary, the NBA and Silver appear to draw upon its most prominent face in showing its authenticity, which is players both past and present. The NBA’s approach to highlight its past involvement in social activism, player care about the issues, and continuing commitment in supporting Black individuals could have been in an effort to show that its roots on the subject are deep and authentic.

The previous four themes of corporate social advocacy may have been utilized to strengthen the case for returning to action. Interwoven with risk communication practice, drawing upon CSA gave a purpose for the platform, ensuring players saw a much deeper meaning than simply resuming play in a sanitized environment.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to answer the following questions: 1) What strategies of Palenchar and Heath’s five essential criteria of risk communication are present in all official NBA statements/Commissioner Silver interviews between June 4, 2020-July 31, 2020 pertaining

to the 2019-20 season restart plans? and 2) How did official NBA statements/Commissioner Silver interviews frame the NBA's approach to CSA between June 4, 2020-July 31, 2020? The first question serves to examine if Palenchar and Heath's (2007) widely-accepted criteria of risk communication theory holds up in a sports risk scenario, while the second seeks to identify themes of CSA that the NBA drew upon, thus helping create a basis for other sports organizations to replicate when communicating in the newly-emerging area of CSA.

The research found that the NBA demonstrated several frames of risk communication consistent with criteria from the theory's most influential scholars Palenchar and Heath (2007). This was achieved through proactive dialogue about extraordinary precautions, an additive messaging approach, adherence to voluntary protocols and specific details about what those protocols were, willingness to disclose, collaboration and community outreach with several credible organizations, willingness to acknowledge uncertainty and avoid absolutes, new digital fan involvement, and an example of resilience. Similarly, several CSA themes emerged in analyzing the NBA's approach to speaking out on racial issues: acknowledging recent events and problems present, affirming action, specific examples of what action would be taken to lift the Black community, and emphasizing authenticity. Frequent ways in which these themes were manifest came by directly addressing the murder of George Floyd, a stated goal that the season restart's purpose would be to combat systemic racism and promote social justice, repeated usage of the phrase "tangible and sustainable ways" to take action, specific plans to increase Black representation and economic empowerment, and affirmation that the league's choice to take on these issues makes up the DNA of the league.

By and large, the NBA season restart was considered successful. 322 out of 332 possible players opted into participation in the bubble (Haislop, 2020). Only a handful left early for

various personal reasons (Goon, 2020) and the season played out with a champion ultimately crowned. Remarkably, zero positive tests occurred after play resumed (Pegher, 2020), showing ultimate proof that protocols detailed prior to the restart were effective. The league was also able to save 1.5 billion in expected revenue loss had the restart not occurred (Beer, 2020). This occurred despite Nielsen Media Research revealing that the Finals ratings as a whole decreased 51% from the year prior (Sprung, 2020). Reasoning for the ratings dip near the end has been theorized to be due in part to the unique conflict of other sports beginning their respective fall seasons and coverage of the impending 2020 U.S. Presidential Election (Lombardo, 2020). Perhaps some viewers may have been off-put by the NBA's focus on social issues outside of the sport itself, but the NFL and NHL - who weren't nearly as vocal about social justice - also saw significant ratings drops in the fall of 2020 (Traina, 2020).

Implications for theory

The study at hand contributes to literature examining corporate framing strategies of risk communication and corporate social advocacy. Namely, it does so by stratifying themes of the NBA's official communications approach in the midst of a distinctive, unreplicable environment of uncertainty. It provides the first-known research template for textual and thematic examination of messaging for a season-restart in any professional sport in the midst of a worldwide public health crisis and social unrest. Furthermore, it is the first to combine risk communication and CSA into a joint analysis, doing so due to the unusual confluence of COVID-19 and a generational spotlight on racial inequality in America combined with the intersection of the NBA's unique platform concerning it. Although the two categories aren't conventionally tied together, official NBA statements and Commissioner Silver's remarks concerning both were frequently interwoven throughout the same statement or interview.

Risk Communication. As one of the two main theories, risk communication predicts effective methods of making risk known and taking appropriate courses of action to lessen perceived risks (Palenchar et al., 2005). Palenchar and Heath argue that effective strategic risk communication is fulfilled through demonstration of adherence to five main criteria: ideas and meaning count, transparency, building trust through community outreach & collaborative decision-making, acknowledging uncertainty, and narrative enactment. The findings of this study show that this theory - though never before studied in a sports context - holds up very well in a sports risk scenario. These criteria can be drawn upon to provide a blueprint for corporations in many fields propagating risk.

For each of the main criteria, the NBA's communication was clearly positioned in a manner that fulfilled these objectives. For example, perhaps the most prominent example of the NBA showing Palenchar and Heath's (2007) effective criteria is collaborative decision-making. Textual analysis yielded further understanding that the NBA frequently cited its partnership with the National Basketball Player's Association (NBPA) in developing safety plans. The league used collaboration in press release titles, statements from player leadership, and also included words such as "agreed," "willingness" and "collaboration." The NBPA wasn't the only entity cited in the development of rigorous safety initiatives as the study noted several reputable health organizations that were referenced, such as the CDC, FDA, WHO, Mayo Clinic, Yale School of Public Health, and more. Several statements discussed how players would follow the counsel of public health officials and infectious disease specialists. The NBA also partnered with several companies for providing tests and affirmed that expert scientists and doctors were continually reviewing the data. Even companies who weren't considered health organizations were partnered with to encourage people to be committed to stopping coronavirus.

This intentional use of partnerships may have been a strategy linked back to what Renn & Levine (1991) found, namely, that fear levels decrease when additional experts more closely specialized are included. The literature review also mentioned that Dickman cited the importance of sports organizations citing WHO to boost legitimacy (2014). The strategic use of player leadership and reputable health organizations showed what Palenchar and Heath called “a satisfactory level of trust” (2007, p. 125).

Another example of criteria the NBA demonstrated was transparency. As the findings indicated, transparency was shown with reference to several safety practices, creation of safety protocols that were regularly reported on, detailed descriptions of in-game health practices, and wording of these practices as enhancements. Commissioner Silver also remained open about the possibility of an outbreak necessitating a shutdown. This also fell under the essential criteria of acknowledging uncertainty. This is supported by Leighton et al.’s assumption that transparency facilitates further participation (2002). This mattered, because players were given these detailed protocols and the vast majority opted in, proving that participation is more likely to occur when measures are communicated. When the players were willing to comply, it led to more public backing in dialogue.

Corporate Social Advocacy. The other theory applied in this study was CSA, which is referred to as a company’s public stance on a contentious social-political issue (Dodd & Supa, 2014). Due to the emerging nature of the theory, it has not been measured to the same degree as the more established theory of corporate social responsibility (CSR). There is existing literature, however, even in the sports area, with one study finding that 73 percent of sports fans say political commentary is acceptable (Srikanth, 2021). Waymer and Logan looked at Nike as an example around social justice, finding that it has increased engagement by pushing the boundary.

Although these studies exist, there remained a lack of a model or criteria for effective CSA practice in sports communication. Another contribution of this study is that the findings seem to indicate a basis or model for how to incorporate social justice-oriented CSA into sports communication within a risk situation. The following basis came through identification of themes the NBA used and will be detailed next.

First, the NBA demonstrated acknowledgement of recent events and problems present. This came through words and phrases such as “racial,” “injustice,” “social justice issues,” “tragedy,” “inequity,” and “racial inequities in our society.” The study found that the NBA acknowledged these existing social problems through a variety of channels, quoting NBPA President Chris Paul, NBPA Executive Director Michele Roberts, Commissioner Silver, and throughout press releases. To begin effective CSA practice, the researcher asserts that acknowledging problems publicly from numerous sources sets the stage and queues audiences for further action.

Next, affirming action is a natural next step after acknowledging a problem. This category does not detail specific action, but instead uses affirmative wording that the organization is committed to fixing the stated problem. The NBA showed its commitment most prominently by stating that the season restart’s goal would be to take collective action to combat systemic racism and promote social justice. The league’s talk of creating meaningful and long-term change was frequent, as was mention of plans for tangible and sustainable ways to address racial inequality. Affirming action can be identified in CSA research with verbiage along the lines of “we” to show unity. Commissioner Silver employed this numerous times in his broadcast interviews.

Specific examples of lifting the Black community is the third criteria, although when applied to other academic studies can be interpreted as specific examples that go further than action-oriented words. The NBA zeroed in on specific plans for assisting the Black community. These included increasing representation across the NBA and its teams, greater inclusion of Black-owned businesses, educational and economic development opportunities, and access to COVID-19 testing. The latter plan crossed paths with risk communication, as assisting the community in matters of COVID-19 gave an avenue for risk communication. The study author notes that detailed plans, much deeper than corporate-speak, demonstrates ways in which the mission is ingrained in practicality.

Lastly, the final criteria is emphasizing authenticity. Sports organizations in particular are often home to diverse athletes. Social justice-oriented CSA is often a natural fit as compared with other organizations. Authenticity is important as it can lead to brand loyalty and positive consumer relationships (Park & Jiang, 2020). The NBA mainly attempted to convey its authenticity through Commissioner Silver's TV interviews, with him discussing that many within the league believed it should speak out. He also gave examples of athletes over the course of the NBA's history who have spoken out and affirmed that this stance was not new. Authenticity has been called the strongest predictor for corporate reputation (Lim & Young, 2021).

Risk Communication & CSA. While much attention has shown distinctive elements of each theory, the study finds that they actually do overlap in particular areas. Providing credence of imbrication can inform future use of both theories when societal circumstances don't necessitate their tether in practice. First, Palenchar and Heath (2007) affirm that risk communication relies heavily on transparency and demonstrating collaboration, and both items

correlate with the theme of affirming action in CSA. Affirming action displays that real action will be taken and outlines ways in which that action is planned. The NBA's frequent mention of partnerships in risk communication was mirrored in its mention of partnerships in CSA for social justice initiatives. Transparency's critical role in risk communication is just as significant in CSA: organizations must outline why particular issues matter to them.

Ideas and meaning count is the first foundational element of risk communication criteria (Palenchar and Heath, 2007). CSA understands that authenticity leads to brand loyalty (Park & Jiang, 2020). Perhaps authenticity can serve as a crucial idea in this category of risk communication, thus helping communication fulfil both theories. Although the study found less examples of risk communications' narrative enactment by the NBA (due in part to the limited length of press releases), narrative enactment was demonstrated through setting forth the idea that the league should serve as an example of health to society. Similarly, the NBA made it clear that it hoped to be an example regarding racial progress and equitable economic outcomes. Narrative enactment can serve to inform CSA in its implementation.

The idea of an additive approach, as discussed in the findings on risk communication, is also known as gain framing (Kahneman & Tversky, 1985). The NBA's effort to help audiences focus on the immersive experiences that would be gained on social media and new camera angles may have been to distract from the loss mindset. This can also be applied in CSA theory. For example, in the NBA's case, justification for the restart as a whole included that it would serve as a net gain for society to place a spotlight on social issues. Both theories can utilize the gain frame to ease concerns and bring purpose behind action being proposed.

In summary, many themes that have emerged from this study can be applied interchangeably. CSA themes can inform risk communication practice in many ways, and vice

versa. Scholars can draw upon these theoretical insights and cross-pollination for future use. Circumstances may not necessitate organizational communication mainly focusing on the two theories in future scenarios, but the overlap can help criteria and themes to be drawn upon from each other.

Implications for Practice

As many recollect, one of the key buzzwords surrounding the pandemic was “unprecedented.” The NBA’s initial cancellation was a significant part of what led to a chain reaction across impacted areas of the globe to take action and prohibit gatherings of large groups. “Unprecedented” characterizes the league’s decision to resume play in a single-site campus. No other league had done so. On top of this, a racial reckoning in America caused many professional athletes to take pause on what really mattered and consider if playing would serve a productive purpose in lending a voice to the space. The novelty and uncertainty of COVID-19’s effect — combined with ubiquitous dialogue concerning racial activism in America — will likely never be replicated in a professional sports communications environment, but valuable takeaways are abundant nonetheless.

By understanding the way in which the NBA decided to employ these communications strategies, organizations in many areas (particularly sports) can take note of how effective communication served to earn buy-in from players, teams, and fans alike.

If facing doubts about the viability of sports in a disease-spreading environment, practitioners of sports leagues should communicate with elements of the five criteria of effective risk communication from Palenchar and Heath as the NBA did (2007). The league’s intentional approach provided clarity as it understood its place as a risk-generating organization. For example, sports organizations in a future health risk scenario should first consider what ideas and

meaning they want to convey. The NBA did this through demonstration of research prior to actions being carried out, frequent reference to “protocols”, and repetitive affirmative wording about these commitments. An additive approach can also serve to distract from what is being subtracted by safety protocols. The NBA did such by emphasizing the new digital experiences that would be gained for fans. Asserting oneself as a community force for good can also serve as an important idea to support throughout the process.

Next, transparency (even when not mandated) is a key to gaining public trust. A sporting league should consider communicating consistent health measures that show how the stated plan is working. The NBA detailed rigorous plans to mitigate risk, restricted access to on-site reporters, and disclosed weekly testing results of all staffers and players on a weekly basis. This was not mandated by government officials; rather, it served to let the public know even when there were early positive tests prior to the season restarting. A willingness to disclose potentially damaging information builds trust. Organizations should consider rigorous details, demonstrating the amount of thought and care that went into game preparations. Commissioner Silver also acknowledged uncertainty, stating that this hadn’t been done before and that the NBA didn’t know if it would work out. Future leaders of a risk generating organization should consider this approach. It can lead to greater grace from the public if things didn’t go according to plan. Silver understood that overconfidence can lead to public backlash.

As has been discussed, practitioners should ensure to involve and communicate about the involvement of several expert partners that are aiding decisions. The NBA’s collaborative wording and involvement of athletes showed how this portrays a unified front.

For future practice from the standpoint of CSA, it’s important to first listen to players’/employees’ collective desires and concerns before speaking as a company. The NBA

became intimately aware of the deep care of players from concerns about racial injustice brought up by the NBPA, and then Commissioner Silver backed these concerns and desires to speak out. He stated on Good Morning America that the NBA is roughly 80 percent black and that these were issues near and dear to their heart. Understanding what the players wanted first empowered the league to proceed to acknowledge recent problems and events. Acknowledging a problem first is necessary to solving any issue, and learning what problems are important to the majority of an organizations' contributing workforce is essential.

Next, practitioners must affirm action. CSA issues can be used as a rallying cry or deeper purpose in keeping people committed. The NBA stated early on that the purpose of the restart would be to draw attention to racial inequities and effect change in real and concrete ways. Use of words such as “tangible,” “sustainable,” “address,” “enable,” “empower,” “expand,” “increase,” “strengthen,” and more are examples of words that serve to affirm that action is set to take place on the issue. If these types of words are used, it remains integral that a company/sports organization then dives deeper into stating how these action words will be carried out.

As discussed, authenticity is crucial for companies speaking out on social issues. If a brand does not demonstrate authenticity to the social advocacy taking place, consumers are more skeptical. Commissioner Silver mentioned how the care about these issues were part of the DNA of the league, having taken place for decades and stretching back to Bill Russell. To demonstrate authenticity, practitioners should follow suit by becoming involved in an area natural to the organization and communicating to publics on why the issue matters to the company.

Finally, examination yielded understanding that the undertaking likely wouldn't have occurred without the element of CSA. Players wanted to participate to shine a spotlight on racial inequalities, even if that meant doing so in a unique, health protocol-laden environment away

from family and friends for several weeks. As stated earlier, drawing upon CSA as a rallying cry may serve to empower organizations to continue forward in the midst of a risk scenario. This is not to suggest companies should insincerely latch onto an item of CSA to justify risk-generating practices, but rather to state that authentic practice of CSA can yield support and potential unification in the midst of a health crisis.

Limitations

The study aimed to focus exclusively on official communications leading up to the 2019-20 season restart. More insight as to how the NBA approached its communications once the games started taking place could have enhanced the study with more totality to draw upon. As mentioned in the study, the restart nearly ended when the Playoffs were beginning with player discontent due to another police brutality incident. Further analysis of press releases during this time could have provided additional details for future practice of CSA.

Future studies could expand the window of analysis for official NBA communications to gain a more holistic picture on what transpired in the totality of the NBA bubble. Another potential limitation is the lack of analysis of outside media coverage. While other studies have examined external media coverage of the NBA restart, they have not done so through a lens of perception of risk communication and corporate social advocacy. This study could be used as a mode of analysis.

Conclusion

The study found definable elements of framing in risk communication and CSA that are utilized across the totality of NBA Communications in the said time period. It also demonstrated that risk communication is applicable to the sports setting while putting forth a basis for elements of effective CSA practice in matters of social injustice. Results showed the manner in which

several effective themes of risk communication were employed, particularly based upon what Palenchar and Heath (2007) proposed as evidence of productive practice. CSA was also not only present, but inextricably tied with risk communication narratives throughout corporate communication of restart plans. The thesis has provided valuable insights to the field of sports communication by demonstrating the NBA's detailed method of communication in an uncertain environment, showing how to approach such uncertain circumstances in times ahead. As professional and college leagues alike handle unknown scenarios that combine elements ranging from stakeholder safety to social advocacy, an understanding of constructive communication strategies is crucial. Takeaways from the NBA's communication amid a global pandemic and proposed season restart can serve as a replicable blueprint for sports communication practitioners in times of societal unrest.

The NBA bubble worked. The league brought 22 teams into an elaborately planned, isolation zone at Disney World in Florida. It pulled off the feat of zero positive tests in a period of over 90 days (Pegher, 2020) It did so with strict quarantine rules, innovative tracking technology, regular COVID-19 testing, and more (Heid, 2020). In retrospect, it's easy for many to praise the NBA for the successful outcome. However, there was plenty of skepticism beforehand (Woodyard, 2021). This study has helped show how the NBA navigated this skepticism in its communications efforts leading up to the restart. Sports and non-sports organizations alike can draw upon practical implications surrounding the theories examined.

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Appendix

Appendix 1.1

2nd Round of Coding - Selected Examples

***Important to Note:** The following material includes selected samples of the second round of coding, along with notes written by the study author during the coding process. As discussed in the methodology, the first round of coding involved identifying any paragraphs that could fit risk communication theory or practice of CSA. Therefore, the study author determined it would be most useful to include coding in the appendix for the second and third rounds of coding.

For the second round of coding, the researcher first identified four themes of CSA. While four categories, or themes, related to CSA were stratified, the sample text includes the coding of material related to two: “acknowledgement of recent events/problems present” and “emphasizing authenticity”. Black text indicates text or transcript from official NBA Communications statements or Commissioner Silver’s broadcast interviews. Blue and green text are personal notes justifying why particular statements belong in categories of analysis. The samples are not comprehensive, but demonstrate the round of coding’s category-based approach which comprehensively takes segments across the sample of all examined statements and pieces them where they fit certain criteria (bolded/italicized categories).

After the samples centered around CSA are shown, two examples of the coding of Palenchar and Heath’s (2007) risk communication criteria appear below. The chosen criteria are “transparency” and “acknowledging uncertainty through community outreach/collaborative decision making.”

Corporate Social Advocacy

Acknowledgement of recent events/problems present

- **Article/Video Present:** [NBA Board of Governors approves competitive format to restart 2019-20 season with 22 teams returning to play](#) (June 4)
 - “We also recognize that as we prepare to resume play, our society is reeling from recent tragedies of racial violence and injustice...”
 - Yesterday, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver, NBA Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer Mark Tatum, NBA Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer Oris Stuart and other league officials met with NBPA Executive Director Michele Roberts, NBPA President Chris Paul, NBPA First Vice President Andre Iguodala and several players to further advance the league’s collective response *to the social justice issues in our country*.
 - [The league isn’t afraid to acknowledge the realities of what the nation is facing. Rather than act like nothing happened, it confronts them.](#)
- **Article/Video Present:** [NBA and NBPA advance talks on social justice efforts](#) (June 24)
 - “This meeting was part of ongoing discussions between the NBA and the Players Association to address the game’s role in facilitating solutions *to the persistent inequities plaguing the Black community.*” [Also listed under the “Affirming Action” category](#)
 - [It isn’t “the alleged persistent inequities,” but simply acknowledges the issue.](#)
- **Article/Video Present:** [NBA extends community testing program as part of 2019-20 season restart in Orlando](#) (July 29)
 - Public health data has made clear that the impacts of the coronavirus are most concentrated in historically marginalized communities of color where access to testing is scarce.
 - [Alludes to research about how COVID-19 most affects members of marginalized communities.](#)
- **Article/Video Present:** [NBA Countdown](#) (7:08, July 25)
 - “That was something very much on the mind of, certainly Chris Paul, Michelle Roberts, and the other players as we were making plans to come down and of course, the George Floyd tragedy happened in the middle of our planning process. There was a point where it wasn’t clear that we would continue on our track. Not because of COVID, but because of social unrest around George Floyd’s murder.
 - [Anytime the league mentions George Floyd’s murder, this is an acknowledgement of recent tragic events.](#)
- **Article/Video Present:** [Good Morning America](#) (6:44, July 29)
 - I think now, an issue like the killing of George Floyd comes, and you know, the NBA is roughly 80% black and similarly with the WNBA. These are issues - in terms of racial inequities in our society - that are near and dear to their heart. [Also listed under “Emphasizing Authenticity”](#)
 - [Another mention of George Floyd.](#)

Emphasizing Authenticity

- [Good Morning America](#) (6:44, July 29)
 - I think now, an issue like the killing of George Floyd comes, and you know, the NBA is roughly 80% black and similarly with the WNBA. These are issues - in terms of racial inequities in our society - that are near and dear to their heart. [This quote is also used in “Acknowledging recent events/problems present”](#)
 - [The statement “near and dear to their heart,” may serve to demonstrate that this is not corporate-driven, but rather due to the players’ concerns. Stating the demographic makeup can help support his claim.](#)
- [NBA and NBPA advance talks on social justice efforts](#) (June 24)

- “As a union of NBA players and as a league, it is our job to use our collective platform to both put a spotlight on those issues and work to effect change. As players, we have taken a leadership role when it comes to using our voices and implementing practical solutions, but there is much work ahead both in Orlando and long-term to continue the momentum and bring about real, long-lasting change to our society.” -Chris Paul [Also under “Affirming action.”](#)
- “The league and the players are uniquely positioned to have a direct impact on combating systemic racism in our country, and we are committed to collective action to build a more equal and just society,” said Silver. [Also under “Affirming action.”](#)
- [NBA and NBPA finalize comprehensive plan for July 30 restart to 2019-20 season](#) (June 26)
 - “Additionally, our platform in Orlando presents a unique opportunity to extend the ongoing fight against systemic racism and police brutality in this country.”- NBPA Executive Director Michelle Roberts [Also under “Affirming action.”](#)
 - This one falls under “emphasizing authenticity” because of Roberts’ wording that this is an opportunity to *extend the ongoing fight*.” This language suggests that the fight is not new and has been happening for a while in society and the league.
- [NBA Countdown](#) (7:08, July 25)
 - “Ultimately, we came together and decided that we should be using this platform to deal with social justice. Again, in terms of images, logos on courts, jerseys, messages, all those things are important, but I think even more importantly is the long-term commitment that, you know, for me has been in the DNA of this league long before I got here in terms of social justice. I think there’s a commitment between us and the players association, the players, that we really have to get into the substance of where we can be leaders for change. I mean, again, we have some of the best-known black men in the NBA, some of the best-known black women in the world who play in the WNBA and I think there’s a collective view that we should be using this platform to help affect change.” [Also under Affirming Action](#). Use of the word “should” conveys a sense of duty and obligation to use the platform for these purposes. Here, Silver puts forth the narrative that the players are driving the initiative.
- [Good Morning America](#) (6:44, July 29)
 - As you pointed out, it's been part of our history. I think of it as part of the DNA of this league. I think of Bill Russell, you know, some of the early players and their activism over the years.
- [Good Morning America](#) (6:44, July 29)
 - And right at the time we were making our plans to relaunch the season is when the death of George Floyd occurred. And I think it frankly almost prevented us from relaunching the season, given the turmoil and how emotional people were around the league and around the country for that matter. [Also under Affirming Action](#)
- [NBA names Oris Stuart Chief People and Inclusion Officer](#) (July 23)
 - He will *continue* to lead the NBA’s Global Inclusion Council and efforts to grow the league’s network of Black-, women- and diverse-owned suppliers. Stuart will also work closely with senior leadership to enable, empower and develop employees in 13 U.S. and international offices. [Also under “Specific examples of lifting the Black Community.”](#)
 - “Oris’ appointment as Chief People and Inclusion Officer is a testament to his impact on our leagues and teams over the past five years,” said NBA Commissioner Adam Silver. “His commitment to developing our employees and driving inclusion at every level of our organization make him uniquely suited for this new role.” [Also “Specific examples of lifting the Black community”](#)
 - I included both of these here because of how the NBA is implying that they have furthered the work of advancing social justice for people of color. In the first

quote, it says “continue,” and then Silver reaffirms Stuart’s work for the past five years, demonstrating that a lot of the league’s efforts for inclusion is not new.

- [Good Morning America](#) (6:44, July 29)
 - You know, messaging is just part of it. But, as those images show of the court: it says Black Lives Matter on the floor, plus players will be wearing messages on their jerseys. You know, but beyond that, we’re working collectively with 30 NBA teams on a foundation dedicated to economic empowerment, specifically focused on black Americans. So as you said, this has been a part of the league forever. Also under “specific examples of lifting the Black community.”
 - I included this because of his emphasis that this has been part of the league forever.

Risk Communication

Transparency

- [NBA Board of Governors approves competitive format to restart 2019-20 season with 22 teams returning to play](#) (June 4)
 - “The NBA and the NBPA are working with infectious disease specialists, public health experts and government officials to establish a rigorous program to prevent and mitigate the risk related to COVID-19, including a regular testing protocol and stringent safety practices.”
 - This also goes along with collaboration. There’s detail about who they’ll be working with, why they’re doing it, and that there’s regular testing and stringent safety.
 - Enforces (Kamrin, 2014) “risk communication involves numerous individuals, including government officials, business and industry leaders, public interest group members, academics, media professionals, and the general public.”
- [NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results](#) (June 26)
 - “In tests conducted of 302 NBA players on June 23, 16 players have tested positive for the coronavirus. Any player who tested positive will remain in self-isolation until he satisfies public health protocols for discontinuing isolation and has been cleared by a physician.”
 - They are clear where players will be following a positive test. They cannot return to play until a doctor lets them. This adds more than just saying how many have tested positive.
- [NBA and NBPA finalize comprehensive plan for July 30 restart to 2019-20 season](#) (June 26)
 - “The National Basketball Association and the National Basketball Players Association announced today that they have finalized a comprehensive plan for a July 30 restart to the 2019-20 season, *which includes stringent health and safety protocols, a single-site campus* at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida...”
 - The focus was not just on basketball’s return, but immediately assuring the general public that stringent health and safety protocols would be followed. Specifying that Walt Disney’s campus is a single-site makes sure audiences know travel isn’t involved.
- [NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results](#) (July 2)
 - “In tests conducted of 344 NBA players between June 24-29, an additional nine players have tested positive for the coronavirus. Twenty-five of 351 players have tested positive since testing began on June 23. In tests conducted of 884 team staff between June 23-29, 10 have tested positive for the coronavirus. Any player, coach or team staff member who tested positive will remain in self-isolation until they satisfy

public health protocols for discontinuing isolation and have been cleared by a physician.”

- The league specifies exactly how many positive tests and how isolation will be in effect, not changing unless a physician clears it.
- NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results (July 13)
 - Of the 322 players tested for COVID-19 since arriving on the NBA Campus July 7, two have returned confirmed positive tests while in quarantine. Those players never cleared quarantine and have since left the Campus to isolate at home or in isolation housing. Since July 1, during in-market testing, 19 NBA players newly tested positive. These players are staying in their home markets and recovering until they are cleared under CDC guidelines and NBA rules for leaving home isolation and joining the Campus.
 - Again, the league specifies that they are in isolation and where they are isolating. CDC guidelines and NBA rules are the criteria for returning. Specifying the CDC and NBA is another example of collaboration.
- NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results (July 20)
 - Of the 346 players tested for COVID-19 on the NBA campus since test results were last announced on July 13, zero have returned confirmed positive tests. In the event that a player on the NBA campus returns a confirmed positive test in the future, he will be isolated until he is cleared for leaving isolation under the rules established by the NBA and the Players Association.
 - Consistent with the theme of how isolation will be under effect. It doesn't specify the CDC guidelines this time.
- NBA and NBPA announce COVID-19 test results (July 29)
 - Of the 344 players tested for COVID-19 on the NBA campus since test results were last announced on July 20, zero have returned confirmed positive tests.
- Enhancements to sideline border, team benches and officials' whistles among new elements for 2019-20 NBA season restart (July 30) *The entirety of this press release centers around safety protocols that will be implemented for in-game action during the season restart. The main discussion points are found below.*
 - *New elements and enhancements include: sideline border, team benches, timeouts, official whistles, replay officials, injury reporting procedures, baseline positioning, scorer's table, coach's attire. Each category just listed includes safety protocols.*
 - This majority of the press release details the transparency the league aims to enact. It gets into many details about how health is being prioritized while still resuming play.
 - One thing to note - there are no visual examples that the NBA uses here. It just describes the atmosphere of games.
 - *• Team Benches: Team benches consist of multiple rows of seats (with appropriate distance between each seat) and are divided into three sections: players; coaches and team staff; and unassigned seats. The 17-seat players section is divided into three rows, with each player assigned a seat by his team. The 12-seat coaches and team staff section, slightly separated from the players section, is divided into three rows of four seats, with each person assigned a seat by his or her team. The unassigned seats section is located near the baseline and reserved only for temporary use to enable player-to-player, coach-to-player or trainer/physician-to-player communication during the game. The unassigned seats are promptly cleaned and disinfected after each use.*
 - The italicized portions here emphasize where the league demonstrates a commitment to limiting spread. This portion even goes into so much detail that it specifies how many seats will be in particular areas.

- • Timeouts: During any timeout or period break, players and coaches can huddle like normal except they must sit in or congregate around movable chairs separate and apart from the team benches. *The movable chairs used during timeouts or period breaks are cleaned and disinfected after each use.*
 - It specifies how players' chairs will be sanitized throughout the game.
- • Officials' Whistles: A cloth covering has been added to the referees' whistles to prevent the spread of spittle.
- • Replay Officials: Replay officials, who make decisions on certain replay situations and facilitate the on-the-court review of others, are working on site at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida rather than at the NBA Replay Center in Secaucus, N.J. The NBA Replay Center will continue to conduct reviews in conjunction with the on-court officials.
 - Assures its publics of a group of individuals that will not be present to help prevent spread.
- • Injury Reporting Procedures: Five hours (local time) prior to the start time of the second game of a back-to-back (instead of 1 p.m. local time) is when teams must designate a participation status (Out, Doubtful, Questionable, Probable or Available) for each player on their roster and identify a specific injury, illness or potential instance of a healthy player resting that may affect any player's participation in the game.
 - Stricter protocols about identifying specific illnesses will be enforced.
- • Baseline Positioning: Broadcast camera operators, photographers or videographers may not be positioned on the hardwood and instead must shoot away from the floor.
 - Another example of how people working there who aren't players must keep their distance.
- • Scorer's Table: The scorer's table is surrounded by plexiglass.
 - Here, the league employs a common practice to reduce spread that has been taking place throughout the United States in retail stores. For its effectiveness, see this article: <https://pubs.aip.org/aip/pof/article-abstract/34/12/125137/2845022/Effectiveness-of-plexiglass-barriers-in-mitigating?redirectedFrom=fulltext>
-
- NBA Countdown with Adam Silver (7:08, July 25)
 - We have a panel of expert scientists and doctors who are reviewing the data on a regular basis and have modeled this with us. So, there's no specific number, but again, if we see any sort of significant spread whatsoever, it will be a health decision and won't be a business decision to shut down.
 - Once again, collaboration is evident here. "Expert scientists and doctors...modeled this with us."
 - Silver makes it clear that the league isn't afraid to shut down. Health is first.
 - (Woo & Chang, 2019). "Pre-established crisis management systems of communication are critical to approaching situations with confidence in messaging." Silver had pre-established what the league would do and didn't hesitate to share it.
- Good Morning America with Adam Silver (6:44, July 29)
 - We have confidence in this protocol that we designed. You referred to it as a bubble. I mean, it's not actually a sealed bubble, but everyone who's on that campus is tested on a daily basis. They're taking extraordinary precautions. The only time they're not wearing masks is when they're actually playing basketball. You know, to the extent that somebody tests positive we'll obviously track them closely. We quarantine people who first come down, so we think we have a plan in place that should work.

- He explains how frequently masks are being worn. They quarantine people before entering and will track anyone that tests positive closely. He expresses confidence in the “protocol,” or “plan.”
 - I just stated this on NBA Countdown in this same category, but it applies here too. (Woo & Chang, 2019). “Pre-established crisis management systems of communication are critical to approaching situations with confidence in messaging.” Silver had pre-established what the league would do and didn’t hesitate to share it.
 - This quote is also on “[acknowledge uncertainty](#).” I would say ultimately we would cease completely if we saw that this was spreading around the campus and something more than an isolated case was happening.
 - Like he said on NBA Countdown, they will shut down if spread is significant.
 - On if he would have qualms shutting down if there was significant spread:
 - I wouldn’t. It’s health and safety first. I mean, that’s always been our guideposts going into this. We’ve worked very closely with the Players Association and all the teams on this. One thing we’ve always pointed out - it’s about relative safety at this point when you look at the high case rates, not just in Florida, but around the country. We also had significant numbers of players who tested positive between the time we shut down our season and when we restarted in early July. So, we jokingly have said, but maybe it’s not so funny, that the safest place in the world may be on this campus at Disney right now. But if it were to turn out to not be the case, certainly we would stop.
 - “We’ve worked very closely with the Players Association and all the teams” is another example of collaboration.
 - Silver is transparent about the league’s plan to shut down if necessary. He assures the public that they are monitoring the case rates outside and inside the bubble.
- [Sportscenter](#) (6:55, June 15)
 - The concern is for everyone, first of all. I mean, you can look on the CDC website in terms of categories of people who are at greater risk and that’s why we’ve spent so much time working through these protocols. It will include physical distancing, other than the times when people absolutely have to be proximate to each other. It will include mask wearing, and it’s also a little bit of a misnomer to call it a bubble because it’s a campus with varying levels of protection depending on proximity to the players and the people in the immediate vicinity. In other words, some of the Disney employees will be going in and out of the campus, but they won’t be in the same room as the players. I mean, there’ll be other people potentially in the same room with players, but they’ll remain physically distant from them. And there will then be those who in essence, will be breathing the same air as the players and vice versa. And for those people, we have to take particular precautions. How that plays out, you know, in terms of, we’re going to be daily testing. I think that’s one of the best safeguards for them. Of course, if we do get a positive test, we’ll be very specifically tracing exactly what context those people had. And then we’ll be continuing isolating anybody who tests positive, but those are the sort of protocols we’re putting in place.
 - He lists physical distancing, mask wearing, and talks about how workers will be physically distanced from players. He affirms daily testing and contact tracing. He then talks about isolation after positive tests. Stating these protocols in an interview shows that the league has a detailed plan.

Building trust through community outreach & collaborative decision making

- [NBA Board of Governors approves competitive format to restart 2019-20 season with 22 teams returning to play](#) (June 4)
 - “The NBA and the NBPA are working with infectious disease specialists, public health experts and government officials to establish a rigorous program to prevent and mitigate the risk related to COVID-19, including a regular testing protocol and stringent safety practices.”
 - [The collaboration is evident.](#)
- [NBA and NBPA finalize comprehensive plan for July 30 restart to 2019-20 season](#) (June 26)
 - “The NBA and the NBPA confirmed today an agreement on health and safety protocols that will govern the resumption of the season. The rigorous program, which addresses risks related to COVID-19 and focuses on the well-being of players, coaches, officials and staff, was developed in consultation with public health experts, infectious disease specialists and government officials.”
 - [There’s the same phraseology here - the Big 3 are mentioned for the second time in a row under this category: public health experts, infectious disease specialists and government officials.](#)
 - [There’s a lot of “the NBA and NBPA” announced ____.](#)
 - “We are grateful to our longtime collaborator Disney for its role in playing host and making this return to play possible, and we also thank the public health officials and infectious disease specialists who helped guide the creation of comprehensive medical protocols and protections.” - Adam Silver
 - [“Public health officials and infectious disease specialists” mentioned again. Specifically calls Disney a collaborator in making the restart possible. This could be argued that it fits under transparency as well because of the mention of “comprehensive medical protocols and protections.”](#)
 - “It has taken true collaboration between the League and the Union – special kudos to our Executive Committee and several other team reps – along with the continued support and assistance from medical experts, public health officials and many others.” -NBPA Executive Director Michelle Roberts
 - [Michelle Roberts again uses the word collaboration. She thanks the Executive Committee, team reps, and medical experts and public health officials. This continues to give off the vibe that the league didn’t just do this on their own.](#)
- [Antetokounmpo, Dončić, Embiid, Gobert, Jokić, Sabonis, Siakam and Simmons headline global reach of 2019-20 NBA season restart](#) (July 29)
 - As part of NBA Together, the league’s global community and social engagement campaign that aims to support, engage, educate and inspire youth, families and fans in response to the coronavirus pandemic, NBA players, legends and coaches have filmed more than 45 PSAs in nine different languages to share vital health and safety information about ways to reduce risk, proper handwashing and hygiene habits, physical distancing, wearing a facemask and staying physically and mentally fit. To date, these messages have generated more than 65 million video views across the league’s global digital and social platforms.
 - [Also under narrative enactment. This fulfills more of the “community outreach” section. Here it talks about how players are trying to set an example, demonstrating specific elements of the importance of following COVID-19 protocols. The phrase “aims to support, engage, educate and inspire youth, families and fans” shows the NBA’s view of itself in society. It tends to show how the NBA sees itself as a relief for society in a sort of form of narrative enactment.](#)
- [NBA extends community testing program as part of 2019-20 season restart in Orlando](#) (July 29)

- The NBA announced today a new community testing program providing thousands of no-cost COVID-19 PCR tests in Orlando, Fla. and team markets nationwide. The program, which is a part of NBA Together, the league’s global community and social engagement campaign that aims to support, engage, educate and inspire youth, families and fans in response to the coronavirus pandemic, tipped off earlier this month and will run through August. The Health and Safety Protocols for the Resumption of the 2019-20 NBA Season, which were finalized with the National Basketball Players Association in June, included plans for several community testing programs.
 - Also under narrative enactment. This discusses the importance of community testing programs and how the league has worked together with communities.
- The NBA is also working with The Fight Is In Us, a nationwide coalition of health officials and other partners, to encourage COVID-19 survivors to donate plasma for virus research and treatments and to share the latest health and safety information and resources regarding the pandemic.
 - Another collaborator. And another message of what they’re doing to support the community.
- The league is continuing its support of scientific research into more accessible testing through research partnerships with the Yale School of Public Health, the Mayo Clinic, and other leading research institutions.
- In addition, the league is supporting multiple other academic and industry partners on pooled testing and rapid turnaround testing that could provide models for businesses reopening safely and for important public health uses including outbreak assessment and control.
- Enhancements to sideline border, team benches and officials’ whistles among new elements for 2019-20 NBA season restart (July 30)
 - “New elements implemented for the season restart reflect a collaboration among the league, players, coaches, referees and team staff, underscore a willingness by all parties to adapt to a challenging environment, and reinforce our commitment to the health and safety of everyone involved,” said NBA President, League Operations Byron Spruell.
 - In Palenchar and Heath’s (2007) article, they quote this - “people tend to be less afraid of risks that come from places, people, corporations or other organizations that they trust, and are more afraid if the risk comes from a source they don’t trust. Many fans look up to the players and coaches of their teams. The league affirming that these players/coaches are involved helps with buy-in.

Appendix 1.2

3rd Round of Coding - Selected Examples

***Important to note:** This round of coding was article/interview based, with each piece of material being individually taken and judged through the lens of the following coding sheets.

The sample will first show the templates of CSA and risk communication, followed with two examples of specific articles coded with the given templates. For the two examples below, blue

text now signifies extracted text from NBA press releases/Commissioner Silver’s interview transcripts, while black text is the template criteria.

4 Sub-Themes of Corporate Social Advocacy (Template)

- *Acknowledgement of recent events/problems present*
 - Any mention of George Floyd, recent protests, or the words/phrases “racial,” “injustice,” “social justice issues,” “tragedy,” or “inequity.”
 - Specific mention of the Black community/people of color and the issues they face. Some of these issues could be educational opportunity, poverty, police brutality, racism, economic opportunity, violence.
- What constitutes *affirming action*?
 - Action-items mentioned to confront racism, inequities, or issues
 - Any stated goals of the restart
 - Talking about partnering with advocacy groups/organizations/players
 - How the platform will be used for social issues while in the bubble
 - Uses of action words/phrases like “committed,” “commitment,” “conversations,” “impact,” “combat,” “goal,” “using our voices,” “implement,” “change,” “affect change,” “fight,” “plans,” “platform,” “reform.”
- What constitutes *specific examples of lifting the black community*?
 - Any specific stated outcomes for the black community, either taking place during the restart or after the bubble restart.
 - Keywords like “empowerment,” “representation,” “lift,” “poverty,” “economic,” “education,” “injustice,” “equality,” “opportunity,” and “brutality” when the league explains specifically how it plans to address inequities within the black community. This goes a step further than *affirming action*, taking note of the **stated outcomes** the league hopes to achieve within the black community as a result of the restart.
- What constitutes *emphasizing authenticity*?
 - [Lim and Young \(2021\)](#) have found that perceived authenticity is the strongest predictor for corporate reputation. The way to achieve authenticity is “through consistency in their firm’s CSA and its actions and delivery of authentic commitment to the advocated issue by eliminating the fake engagement perception.” In other words, is the NBA showing that it is consistent, committed, and that real actions are taking place?
 - Any mention of the natural fit or history of the NBA and its stance.
 - Reference to the players’ desire to promote/discuss racial reform
 - Specific mention of former players who have prioritized this issue.
 - Discussion of the makeup of the league.
 - Words/phrases like “always been a priority,” “history,” “important,” “care,” “unique opportunity,” and “platform.”
 - This section justifies why the league caring about social justice is a fit with the brand.

Sample of analysis using CSA coding sheet:

Item of Analysis 6: Commissioner Silver on [NBA Countdown](#) (7:08, July 25)

4 Sub-Themes of Corporate Social Advocacy

- *Acknowledgement of recent events/problems present*

- Any mention of George Floyd, recent protests, or the words/phrases “racial,” “injustice,” “social justice issues,” “tragedy,” or “inequity.”
 - “That was something very much on the mind of, certainly Chris Paul, Michelle Roberts, and the other players as we were making plans to come down.” -Silver
 - “The George Floyd tragedy happened in the middle of our planning process.” - Silver
 - “There was a point where it wasn’t clear that we would continue on our track. Not because of COVID, but because of social unrest around George Floyd’s murder.”
- Specific mention of the Black community/people of color and the issues they face. Some of these issues could be educational opportunity, poverty, police brutality, racism, economic opportunity, violence.
- What constitutes *affirming action*?
 - Action-items mentioned to confront racism, inequities, or issues
 - We really have to get into the substance of where we can be leaders for change.
 - Affect change
 - We’ve been in pretty intense discussions with the players association about how we can come together through a foundation by committing resources
 - Any stated goals of the restart
 - We should be using this platform to deal with social justice.
 - Talking about partnering with advocacy groups/organizations/players
 - There’s a commitment between us and the players association
 - How the platform will be used for social issues while in the bubble
 - Uses of action words/phrases like “committed,” “commitment,” “conversations,” “impact,” “combat,” “goal,” “using our voices,” “implement,” “change,” “affect change,” “fight,” “plans,” “platform,” “reform.”
 - Committing resources
- What constitutes *specific examples of lifting the black community*?
 - Any specific stated outcomes for the black community, either taking place during the restart or after the bubble restart.
 - One of the areas in particular that our league is going to focus on together with the players association is *economic empowerment*.
 - I’m really pushing for change particularly around *economic opportunities*.
 - Keywords like “empowerment,” “representation,” “lift,” “poverty,” “economic,” “education,” “injustice,” “equality,” “opportunity,” and “brutality” when the league explains specifically how it plans to address inequities within the black community. This goes a step further than *affirming action*, taking note of the **stated outcomes** the league hopes to achieve within the black community as a result of the restart.
- What constitutes *emphasizing authenticity*?
 - Is the NBA showing that it is consistent, committed, and that real actions are taking place?
 - Any mention of the natural fit or history of the NBA and its stance.
 - Images, logos on courts, jerseys, messages, all those things are important, but I think even more importantly is the long-term commitment that, you know, for me has been in the DNA of this league long before I got here in terms of social justice.
 - Reference to the players’ desire to promote/discuss racial reform
 - They’re still learning a lot about these issues and I think, sort of, in the process of thinking collectively how we can best use our resources to really lead to change.
 - Specific mention of former players who have prioritized this issue.
 - Discussion of the makeup of the league.

- We have some of the best-known black men in the NBA, some of the best-known black woman in the world who play in the WNBA
 - Words/phrases like “always been a priority,” “history,” “important,” “care,” “unique opportunity,” and “platform.”
 - DNA
 - There’s a collective view that we should be using this *platform* to help affect change.
- This section justifies why the league caring about social justice is a fit with the brand.

5 Sub-Themes of Risk Communication (Template)

- What constitutes coding for *ideas and meaning count*?
 - Evidence of “formative research prior to implementing a risk communication campaign”
 - Formulate personal response plans
 - Any discussion of worst-case scenarios
 - Improving perception that the industry is a positive economic/community force
 - Demonstration of teaching risks to public/players
 - Proactive dialogue
- What constitutes *transparency*?
 - “The degree to which organizational actions and decisions are ascertainable and comprehensible by interested parties.”
 - Where did the NBA demonstrate active participation in acquiring, distributing, and creating knowledge? (Grunig & Huang, 2000).
 - A willingness to disclose
 - Demonstration of adherence to and improvement of voluntary protocols and laws
 - No reason to believe that it is limiting access to or propagandizing information about risk
 - Any mention of verification standards (in this case, citing others so there is more credibility).
- What constitutes *build trust over time through community outreach and collaborative decision making*?
 - The source of information cited is trusted
 - Demonstration of partnerships, whether new or established over time.
- What constitutes *acknowledge the uncertainty in risk assessments*?
 - Doing so does not involve absolute definitions
 - A demonstration of balance between overrepresentation of risk and acknowledgement of uncertainty.
 - Acknowledge things may not go as planned to incentivize knowledge for better understanding.
- What constitutes *risk communication is carried out as narrative enactment*?
 - Look for risk narratives, which can occur where companies tend to speak as individuals, sharing thoughts and perspectives on a range of issues (not just what pertains to the company’s core function). This could be community issues.
 - Speaking about other issues or the organization’s place in society can help it appeal to other stakeholders
 - Look for any form of storytelling.

Sample of analysis using risk communication coding sheet:

Article 3: NBA and NBPA finalize comprehensive plan for July 30 restart to 2019-20 season (June 26)

5 Sub-Themes of Risk Communication

- What constitutes coding for *ideas and meaning count*?
 - Evidence of “formative research prior to implementing a risk communication campaign”

- Formulate personal response plans
 - “We have worked together with the Players Association to establish a restart plan that prioritizes health and safety.” -Silver
- Any discussion of worst-case scenarios
- Improving perception that the industry is a positive economic/community force
- Demonstration of teaching risks to public/players
- Proactive dialogue
 - stringent health and safety protocols
 - The rigorous program
- What constitutes *transparency*?
 - “The degree to which organizational actions and decisions are ascertainable and comprehensible by interested parties.”
 - Where did the NBA demonstrate active participation in acquiring, distributing, and creating knowledge? (Grunig & Huang, 2000).
 - A willingness to disclose
 - Demonstration of adherence to and improvement of voluntary protocols and laws
 - No reason to believe that it is limiting access to or propagandizing information about risk
 - The rigorous program, which addresses risks related to COVID-19 and focuses on the well-being of players, coaches, officials and staff, was developed in consultation with public health experts, infectious disease specialists and government officials.
 - Any mention of verification standards (in this case, citing others so there is more credibility).
- What constitutes *build trust over time through community outreach and collaborative decision making*?
 - The source of information cited is trusted
 - Demonstration of partnerships, whether new or established over time.
 - The NBA and the NBPA confirmed today an agreement on health and safety protocols that will govern the resumption of the season.
 - The rigorous program... was developed in consultation with public health experts, infectious disease specialists and government officials.
 - “We also thank the public health officials and infectious disease specialists who helped guide the creation of comprehensive medical protocols and protections.” - Silver
 - “It has taken true collaboration between the League and the Union – special kudos to our Executive Committee and several other team reps – along with the continued support and assistance from medical experts, public health officials and many others.” -Michelle Roberts
- What constitutes *acknowledge the uncertainty in risk assessments*?
 - Doing so does not involve absolute definitions
 - A demonstration of balance between overrepresentation of risk and acknowledgement of uncertainty.
 - Acknowledge things may not go as planned to incentivize knowledge for better understanding.
- What constitutes *risk communication is carried out as narrative enactment*?
 - Look for risk narratives, which can occur where companies tend to speak as individuals, sharing thoughts and perspectives on a range of issues (not just what pertains to the company’s core function). This could be community issues.
 - Speaking about other issues or the organization’s place in society can help it appeal to other stakeholders
 - Look for any form of storytelling.

Appendix 1.3

NBA Communications Press Release/Interview Samples

***Important to Note:** While links to each official NBA material examined is found in the methodology and references, the following information provides the transcript of two examined press releases and one interview with Adam Silver.

Press Release - Example 1

Title: NBA and NBPA finalize comprehensive plan for July 30 restart to 2019-20 season

Date: June 26, 2020

Text: NEW YORK – The National Basketball Association and the National Basketball Players Association announced today that they have finalized a comprehensive plan for a July 30 restart to the 2019-20 season, which includes stringent health and safety protocols, a single-site campus at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida and the goal of taking collective action to combat systemic racism and promote social justice.

In addition, the NBA and Disney have reached an agreement that makes the Arena, the Field House and Visa Athletic Center at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex the venues for all games for the remainder of the season, which will resume with 22 teams returning to play and with no fans in attendance.

The NBA and the NBPA confirmed today an agreement on health and safety protocols that will govern the resumption of the season. The rigorous program, which addresses risks related to COVID-19 and focuses on the well-being of players, coaches, officials and staff, was developed in consultation with public health experts, infectious disease specialists and government officials.

As announced on Wednesday, the NBA and the NBPA have agreed in principle that the goal of the season restart will be to find tangible and sustainable ways to address racial inequality across the country. Leaders from the NBA and the NBPA have also discussed strategies to increase Black representation across the NBA and its teams, ensure greater inclusion of Black-owned and operated businesses across NBA business activities, and form an NBA foundation to expand educational and economic development opportunities across the Black community. In recognition that long-term change can only come from an informed and sustained commitment, conversations regarding these efforts will continue and additional details will be released at a later date.

“We have worked together with the Players Association to establish a restart plan that prioritizes health and safety, preserves competitive fairness and provides a platform to address social justice issues,” said NBA Commissioner Adam Silver. “We are grateful to our longtime collaborator Disney for its role in playing host and making this return to play possible, and we also thank the public health officials and infectious disease specialists who helped guide the creation of comprehensive medical protocols and protections.”

“It is very exciting to officially announce the restart of the 2019-2020 season,” said NBPA Executive Director Michele Roberts. “It has taken true collaboration between the League and the Union – special kudos to our Executive Committee and several other team reps – along with the continued support and assistance from medical experts, public health officials and many others. Additionally, our platform in Orlando presents a unique opportunity to extend the ongoing fight against systemic racism and police brutality in this country. We will continue to work with our players and the League to develop specific plans in Orlando as well as long-term initiatives to bring about real change on these issues.”

“We’re glad to be able to provide a unique venue where the NBA can resume its season at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex,” said Josh D’Amaro, Chairman, Disney Parks, Experiences and Products. “We look forward to welcoming the players, coaches and staff to Walt Disney World Resort as they prepare for the exciting return of professional basketball.”

Under the competitive format for the restart, the 22 participating teams will be the eight teams in each conference with the highest current winning percentages and the six teams that are currently within six games of the eighth seed in either conference.

The restart will begin with each participating team playing eight “seeding games,” as selected from its remaining regular-season matchups. The complete game and national television schedules for the seeding games will be announced tonight. The NBA and its broadcast and technology partners are collaborating to enhance game telecasts and bring fans an immersive, interactive viewing experience.

At the conclusion of the seeding games, the seven teams in each conference with the highest combined winning percentages across regular-season games and seeding games will be the first through seventh seeds for the NBA Playoffs for that conference. If the team with the eighth-best combined winning percentage (regular-season games and seeding games) in a conference is more than four games ahead of the team with the ninth-best combined winning percentage in the same conference, then the team with the eighth-best winning percentage would be the eighth playoff seed in that conference.

If the team with the eighth-best combined winning percentage in a conference (Team 8) is four games or fewer ahead of the team with the ninth-best combined winning percentage in the same conference (Team 9), then those two teams would compete in a play-in tournament to determine

the eighth playoff seed in the conference. The play-in tournament will be double elimination for Team 8 and single elimination for Team 9.

The NBA's standard playoff tiebreaker procedures will be used to break any ties on the basis of winning percentage. Once the 16-team playoff field is set, the NBA Playoffs will proceed in a traditional conference-based format with four rounds and best-of-seven series in each round.

The 2020 NBA Finals will end no later than Oct. 13.

About ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex

ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, located at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, is one of the premier sites for amateur sports in the nation. The complex hosts more than 100 entertainment and sporting events each year and has accommodated 70 different sports featuring athletes from 70 different countries. Designed to provide professional, amateur and youth athletes with experiences synonymous with the names Disney and ESPN, the 220-acre facility features multiple competition venues, including 16 baseball/softball fields, a 9,500-seat ballpark, 18 multi-purpose outdoor fields for soccer, football and field hockey, three indoor venues for basketball, volleyball, cheerleading, dance and other indoor sports, a track & field facility and a cross country course. For more information, visit www.disneysportsnews.com for news releases, photos and videos. Follow us on Twitter at @ESPNWWOS and at Facebook at ESPNWWOS.

Press Release - Example 2

Title: Enhancements to sideline border, team benches and officials' whistles among new elements for 2019-20 NBA season restart

Date: July 30, 2020

Text: NEW YORK– The NBA today announced new elements and enhancements to existing policies and procedures in Basketball Operations, Referee Operations and other areas for the resumption of the 2019-20 season, including a wider border around the sidelines, a revised setup for team benches and a new covering on officials’ whistles.

“New elements implemented for the season restart reflect a collaboration among the league, players, coaches, referees and team staff, underscore a willingness by all parties to adapt to a challenging environment, and reinforce our commitment to the health and safety of everyone involved,” said NBA President, League Operations Byron Spruell.

The new elements and enhancements include:

- **Sideline Border:** To assist with perception and visibility on the court and adjust for not having courtside fans to help define the boundaries, the border around the court has been widened to 8 inches from 2 inches. During a throw-in from out of bounds, the thrower-in may continue to step on the line but may not touch the floor over the line until the ball is released.
- **Team Benches:** Team benches consist of multiple rows of seats (with appropriate distance between each seat) and are divided into three sections: players; coaches and team staff; and unassigned seats. The 17-seat players section is divided into three rows, with each player assigned a seat by his team. The 12-seat coaches and team staff section, slightly separated from the players section, is divided into three rows of four seats, with each person assigned a seat by his or her team. The unassigned seats section is located near the baseline and reserved only for temporary use to enable player-to-player, coach-to-player or trainer/physician-to-player communication during the game. The unassigned seats are promptly cleaned and disinfected after each use.

- **Timeouts:** During any timeout or period break, players and coaches can huddle like normal except they must sit in or congregate around movable chairs separate and apart from the team benches. The movable chairs used during timeouts or period breaks are cleaned and disinfected after each use.
- **Officials' Whistles:** A cloth covering has been added to the referees' whistles to prevent the spread of spittle.
- **Replay Officials:** Replay officials, who make decisions on certain replay situations and facilitate the on-the-court review of others, are working on site at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida rather than at the NBA Replay Center in Secaucus, N.J. The NBA Replay Center will continue to conduct reviews in conjunction with the on-court officials.
- **Injury Reporting Procedures:** Five hours (local time) prior to the start time of the second game of a back-to-back (instead of 1 p.m. local time) is when teams must designate a participation status (Out, Doubtful, Questionable, Probable or Available) for each player on their roster and identify a specific injury, illness or potential instance of a healthy player resting that may affect any player's participation in the game.
- **Baseline Positioning:** Broadcast camera operators, photographers or videographers may not be positioned on the hardwood and instead must shoot away from the floor.
- **Scorer's Table:** The scorer's table is surrounded by plexiglass.
- **Coach's Attire:** Head coaches and assistant coaches are permitted to wear polo shirts instead of business attire.

Commissioner Silver Interview Transcript - Example

Outlet: ESPN

Show: Sportscenter

Reporter - Several high profile players, including Kyrie Irving and Dwight Howard, expressed over the weekend some hesitation about coming back for a variety of reasons, some of them involving health and safety concerns and some of them involving social justice concerns. What conversations have you had with those players to assure them of whatever assurances they need?

Silver - Our conversations have been with the Players Association and their leadership over the past several months. We work through all those issues in terms of health and safety and what the environment will be like on the campus, but I can only say it may not be for everyone. I mean, it will entail enormous sacrifice on behalf of those players and for everyone involved, the coaches and the referees. Listen, it's not an ideal situation where we're trying to find a way to our own normal in the middle of a pandemic. [It's] in the middle of essentially a recession or worse with 40 million unemployed and now with enormous social unrest in the country. As we work through these issues, I can understand how some players may feel that it's not for them. As you said, it could be for a host of reasons -- it may be for family reasons, it may be for health reasons they have or maybe because they feel, as some players have said very recently, that their time is best spent elsewhere. And so again, we're dealing with a Players Association representing 450 guys for 22 teams. When you include the two way players, we're talking about bringing roughly 375 players down to Orlando. Not surprisingly, there's not a uniform view among those players. My sense is, we're going to be able to work through most of those issues over the next few weeks, but as I said, we also have an arrangement with the Players Association where if a player chooses not to come, it's not a breach of his contract. We accept that.

Reporter - Let's talk a little bit about what the bubble experience is going to be like. Obviously, safety and health of players and everyone involved is always going to be first and foremost. You and I have had that conversation. But what specifically are your concerns for some of the older

people who will be in there? There are three coaches who are over the age of 65 who will be back, and certainly there will be others who are not young, healthy athletes. What are the concerns there and what provisions can you make for those people?

Silver - The concern is for everyone, first of all. I mean, you can look on the CDC website in terms of categories of people who are at greater risk and that's why we've spent so much time working through these protocols. It will include physical distancing, other than the times when people absolutely have to be proximate to each other. It will include mask wearing, and it's also a little bit of a misnomer to call it a bubble because it's a campus with varying levels of protection depending on proximity to the players and the people in the immediate vicinity. In other words, some of the Disney employees will be going in and out of the campus, but they won't be in the same room as the players. I mean, there'll be other people potentially in the same room with players, but they'll remain physically distant from them. And there will then be those who in essence, will be breathing the same air as the players and vice versa. And for those people, we have to take particular precautions. How that plays out, you know, in terms of, we're going to be daily testing. I think that's one of the best safeguards for them. Of course, if we do get a positive test, we'll be very specifically tracing exactly what context those people had. And then we'll be continuing isolating anybody who tests positive, but those are the sort of protocols we're putting in place.

Reporter - Let's talk about schedule. This obviously is an unprecedented circumstance. And so everyone, including yourself, is just trying to figure out the best ways to get everything done. If this season should take you into early October. Tell me what happens then? The season ends and you crown a champion. Then where do we go from there?

Silver - We go to the draft, which we've tentatively scheduled for October 15th. And then we look roughly for a return to training camp sometime in November. And, very tentatively, we'd be looking to start next season in early December.

Reporter - Which is obviously quite a short turnaround. What conversations can you share with me that you've had with Michelle Roberts or others about any concerns that might arise from such a quick turnaround between the end of one season and the beginning of the next?

Silver - Well, first of all, we've had turnarounds like that for some players before who participated in Olympic competition or a competition before, so it's not unprecedented. What the conversations we've had with Michelle and the players is that, like I've said, those are tentative dates. We need to work through them. But again, Mike, I mean, we're dealing with extraordinary circumstances. I mean, not that anybody's forgetting, but this is an incredibly unique circumstance. And we're trying to do what has never been done before as far as I know. To find a way, you know, to create our own sense of normality through all these incredibly difficult societal forces. And so, as I said, sacrifice in terms of the amount of turnaround, sacrifice in terms of how these players, coaches, referees, and others will be living on this campus. That's all going to be part of this, and I don't want to sugarcoat it. Yes, will the turnaround be faster and quicker than normal? Absolutely. You know, will there be hardship along the way? You know, I should say too, that you know, a lot of people pointed to the financial component of this. And Damian, I know is coming up, he can speak to this. I mean, the incremental difference between at this point playing and not playing isn't nearly as great as people think, especially given the enormous expense of putting this on. Really, it's more sense from the entire NBA community that we have an obligation to try this because the alternative is to stay on the sidelines. And the alternative is to, in essence, give in to this virus. While on one hand, this won't be forever and we

will ultimately find a vaccine, presumably, or some sort of, you know, antivirals that will help deal with the people who have conditions of COVID-19. For us, you know, we feel this is what this is what we do. You know, we put on NBA basketball. We think that for the country, it'll be a respite from enormous difficulties people are dealing with in their lives right now. And I also think in terms of social justice issues, it will be an opportunity for NBA players in the greater community to draw attention to these issues because the world's attention will be on the NBA in Orlando, Florida if we're able to pull this off.