

Saint Joseph's Press Conference – April 4, 2019

Billy Lange, Head Men's Basketball Coach

Jill Bodensteiner, Director of Athletics

On Saint Joseph's players

BL: The most important recruits right now, they need a face, they need an energy, they need a love. And to just talk to them and just be honest with them. You know the current landscape of college basketball, as Jill alluded to, is complicated, it's complex there's a lot of voices in their ears and I just need to be one right now. So that's my main priority and focus. Anytime you get a job there's a lot of people that reach out to you. Anytime you get a head coaching job like this prestigious one I needed to update my data cellular plan. It was amazing the amount of texts and phone calls we got. So I'm sifting through recruits and who is capable of being a student-athlete on this campus, in this community, playing at this level, fitting the vision. Those are my priorities right now.

On the rebuilding process with 76ers and how he will bring it here

BL: One, you have to just have a steadfast energy. And listen I'm not walking in here to tear something down. If it's good we're going to just progress it forward. So, there are little cultural things that add up day by day. They can be something as simple as what do they wear into a gym, or how they hang their loops in the locker room, or how they approach their nutrition - just knowing all those little things add up and being peaceful and patient with it. And eventually we're going to have to surround ourselves with good people that want to be in it. And I think those are probably the things that took the most from my time with Brett (Brown) during that process.

How experiences on all different levels has helped prepare him to become head coach

Every experience adds up. You know I love basketball. When I was at Bishop Eustace, we played Penn Tech. They had the corner of the court was like edged out so you couldn't even shoot a corner three. You had to step in. It's just basketball. I mean to me it's just basketball. So, when you get on a court and you're with your team, you coach that team. That is the team that you are coaching. Right now, I'm with Saint Joseph's and this is my team... Each experience adds up. I've learned from time at the Naval Academy mistakes that maybe I made - things I could have possibly done better. Practice efficiency, times that I was at Villanova learning a lot under Jay (Wright) and the program's direction. In the NBA, the importance of player development, pace of play. All of them have added up. You know I'm still harping back on a lot of my memories from being a Division III coach and a high school head coach.

On familiarity with the SJU players

BL: You have to be careful because I've done this before, you don't want to just come up with preconceived notions. We're going to play a different style of play. Guys get better from sophomore to junior, junior to senior. Bodies have to change. It's a big point of emphasis for us in these few days. We're talking about our fitness level. And players get better. They get better so I don't want to just make decisions without getting a chance to put my arms on them yet.

On his journey to this point

BL: I've been blessed. All the jobs I have been in have been great jobs. That is the reason other people look at you is that you're doing something well at some place that's special. With the 76ers, I can't say enough about my time there. I miss those guys. You start wrapping your head around what is an epic opportunity. And you get a call that Saint Joseph's would like to meet with you and you start thinking about being the head coach at Saint Joseph's. I wanted to walk in there and meet with Dr. Reed and Jill. You're talking about the president and the athletic director at this great institution, so I better be prepared. So you start wrapping your head around the institution, the program, the city, a plan, a vision, and you start getting really, really excited. I think it was a little overwhelming just in terms of do you sleep? Do you not sleep? Can you sleep? I couldn't. And there was a lot of things going on. Kemba Walker, Giannis, Kyrie, Trae Young. I mean there was a lot going on in my mind as we (Sixers) were preparing. But when I started to really wrap my head around this chance, this opportunity, what it means to me – it might not mean that much to everyone – but for me, this as good as it gets. This is epic. And what I thought it would mean for my family and my children, and what we could do for the community, a chance to impact lives, I was ready to go.

On Billy's hiring

JB: I was ecstatic. This is big. Within 10 minutes of hearing him in that interview, I knew this was our next head coach. I had never met him but I had done all my research... And he absolutely blew me away. So, then about halfway through the interview, I started thinking that I hope he'd take this position if offered. When we agreed to terms, I was absolutely ecstatic and thrilled for the future of Saint Joseph's University and its men's basketball program.

On transfer portal and roster

BL: We can fill a roster. That's not going to be a problem. We need to fill a roster with people that are going to represent Saint Joseph's and want to work the way we're going to work. We can't talk about culture if they're not going to represent it.

Lessons learned from past experience

BL: Impatience... Understanding it's a big picture thing, a long haul. And that's it. You want to be urgent. You want to be intense. But there has to be a wisdom about it at this stage right now where you go about making your best decisions, and I've learned that.

Dynamics of Philly basketball changing

BL: The focus always has to be on our brand. And part of our brand is the Big 5. And part of our brand is the city, whether they're taking trolleys, Ubers, riding bikes, we have to focus on Saint Joseph's basketball. And that brand has to be focused on player development. Guys come to college, yes, they're student-athletes, but if you're a basketball player at this level, you want to play professionally. Whether that is the NBA or the G-League, or overseas, we're going to welcome that. Why would we not? I'm here because I'm a dream chaser... I understand that the Big 5 maybe or maybe not has lost its luster, I don't think it has. I think it's as competitive and passionate as it's ever been. It's just different. We have got to work within that difference and the best thing we can do, and I know this, is to worry about our brand and our culture. And the Big 5 will be a part of that. We can sell that pretty easily I think.

JB: One of the trickiest things about being an athletic director is balancing tradition with innovation. I came from a place (Notre Dame) with a good deal of tradition... And I think Big 5 basketball is the same. How do we respect and manage and appreciate and live out that tradition in 2019 while still being innovative? People consume it in different ways... It's difficult throughout Division I to get fans to come to games. People can sit at home with three screens and click back and forth. So we have to appreciate and celebrate that tradition, but we can't just stay the same.