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TRANSITION MUSIC

Cyril Goddeeris: Hi everyone. And welcome to Talks at GS. It's my honor to be joined today by my friend Steve Nash, NBA Hall of Fame point guard and head coach of the Brooklyn Nets. He was an eight-time NBA All Star. And is an NBA Hall of Fame Inductee. He's also the founder of the Steve Nash Foundation, which works to increase access to critical needs resources for children in underserved communities and populations.

Steve, thank you so much for joining us.

Steve Nash: How are you?

Cyril Goddeeris: First, I kind of want to start with your early career. You've had a somewhat improbable path. Went to the NBA. You've accomplished enormous things, both on and off the court. Talk a little bit about your early interest in sports, the role models who shaped and influenced you, and help us understand the formative, you know, moments that took place and took you really from Victoria, British Columbia to the NBA?

Steve Nash: My parents were born in the UK, London. Got married there and wanted to move somewhere warm, so they emigrated to South Africa. I was born there. And by the time I was a year old we moved to Canada. They didn't want me to grow up with the apartheid. So, fortunately for me we moved to Canada and had, you know, a pretty great job up there on the west coast.

My dad was a semi-pro soccer player. Just loved sports. So, it was definitely something that we bonded over as a child. He was-- you know, while soccer was his passion, he loved all sports. And I think that he had a real-- you know, we had bond over that. But he was also really supportive of us playing all the sports.

So, I thought it was, you know, fantastic for me as an athlete

to start out playing everything and anything and having, you know, a great education, so to speak, or experience playing all these different sports. And, you know, basketball, actually, other than rugby, which I played in 11th and 12th grade, basketball was the last sport that I played. And I think in many respects the other sports I played are to be credited with my success in basketball. I think that it allowed me to think and feel and see things a little differently. And I was able to make up some of the ground that, perhaps, you know, I wasn't born with some of the gifts that some of my contemporaries, you know, had. And I had to make up that ground somewhere. And I think some of that was through my diversity of sports growing up and the ability to acquire skill and to see things in a different way because of that background.

Cyril Goddeeris: So, Steven, go into your NBA career a little bit. Your NBA career spanned a couple generations, from my perspective. But what I really want to focus on, the Phoenix Suns of the early 2000s. You know, your seven second offense really represented a big transformation in the NBA. And I think there's, like, a pre period of that and a post period of that in the NBA. Can you give me some perspective of that transition and what it's meant and what the NBA is now versus then?

Steve Nash: Yeah, you know, the game can be a little cyclical. And then I think the NBA, you know, is always trying to improve their product. I think in the '90s it got very bogged down in very defensive, very physical, a lot of holding and grabbing. And you know, I think that they looked at the interests in the game with the ratings, and the influence that this is going in a direction that won't grow our game. But if we open it up a little more. If we can see the athleticism, speed, movement, all the beautiful parts of the game that come by tightening up the rules defensively, I think that's what they were looking at.

So, the game became more open. Was a little less physical. It made the game faster, the pace. And it's way up. I mean, I think that Phoenix Suns team, you know, would be bottom five in pace nowadays. So, at the time everyone thought we were playing fast and we were kind of, you know, in some ways I think some people thought, well, we couldn't win that way and we were too small.

You know, frankly, we played fast, and we were small. We didn't have a true center. We played Amar Stoudemire, who's more of a traditional power forward at center. I think it was brilliant by Mike D'Antoni. But a lot of people were naysaying. And if

anything, we didn't push it hard enough and we didn't double down. And we were just before the analytics era where, you know, we started to value the three-point shot accordingly. And we were a team that probably should have, like I said, doubled down on that speed and pace and space that's just so common today. But I think we were one of the teams that, you know, had an impact on where the game was going and growing the interest in the way the game, you know, was exciting to a bigger fanbase.

Cyril Goddeeris: You've led and competed on a number of people. Who would you say were the coaches who were most impactful, you know, on you, your leadership style? And what was it that they brought to you that was unique?

Steve Nash: All the coaches I played for had an impact on me and for different reasons. And so, from junior high school, high school, college, to my pro coaches, like all of them. I greatly respect, admire, and helped me a lot. And so, they've impacted me or influenced me in tangible and intangible ways that are, you know, a part of who I am and how I coach. And those experiences are one of the incredibly formative.

But you know, my high school coach was super detail oriented. You know, my college coach was really about mental toughness. My NBA coaches, you know, taught me different things about the NBA game and the way it's played. And so, you know, whether it's Mike D'Antoni or Don Nelson, they're both brilliant, and many others, that influenced me tactically, but also the way they manage a group. And so, there are so many factors and ways I've been influenced by great people. And that's one of the reasons I'm here coaching today, is that I did have the fortune of playing for some incredible people.

Cyril Goddeeris: So, when we look at leading parts of our organization here, you know, I think often about, you know, individual accountability and then collective responsibility. So, you know, what's your duty on the floor? And then what are you responsible to your coworkers, and in your case your teammates? How in basketball do you, you know, manage that?

Steve Nash: That is the job. That is the challenge. Is, you know, it's really about people. You know, how can you get the best out of people individually and collectively? How can you facilitate, you know, the most efficiency out of a group? And that is by having individuals feel a sense of joy, purpose, reward, identity. And then being able to fit into the fabric of a group where they're able to continue, you know, that sense of

all those characteristics. You know? That they feel valued and they feel hope and striving and improvement, all those things that make you individually feel good, they also have to transfer into the fabric or the mesh of a group.

And so, you know, that's the delicate balance. But it really is about people more so. Like, you know, the Xs and Os, they are a component, but they're a small component in that, you know, most of the coaches in the NBA, they know the Xs and Os. That's not necessarily hard. Now, your ability to teach, message, and you know, coordinate, have a methodology, sequencing of that stuff, yeah, sure, there's art and science to that. And it's a great skill. But if you can't get the people part down, you know, that stuff almost means very little.

So, you know, it's about, I think, connecting with people, making them feel heard and valued. Making them feel like there's a path for their success. There's hope. There are all those things that human beings want. And so, to me, that's where you start and in most things about trying to get the best out of a group.

Cyril Goddeeris: I read a quote recently that you made that said that you're cold and analytic on the numbers. Quote, cold and analytical on the numbers around data. You know, how does data, you know, we're in a data-obsessed industry as well, how does data interact with your leadership style? Like is that a tool for forcing objectivity? Or, you know, how do you think about that?

Steve Nash: I think it has to be a blend. You know? I think that the data is, the analytics are really important because it gives you a trust factor in what you're seeing and directions you want to move in. I think it's very dangerous nowadays and what we know about data to just follow your gut and in the eye test. I think you have to align the two and you have to value all the information and data and trends that you can to make sure that you feel confident in the direction you're going. There's proof in the pudding, so to speak, with the data. And without the data, you know, it's a bit of a blind leap.

So, I think to be able to couple the two is really the best practice. But you definitely have to constantly lean on the data. Constantly dig into, decipher-- you know? Because data is up for interpretation in some rights. So, how you interpret it, how you align it with your values, your personalities in your group? You know? How can it best apply to your group?

So, I think when I made that quote it was more about, you know, that stuff is matter of fact. But personalities, you know, it's about caring. You know? Can you care for people? Can you show them that you believe in them? You know, then you-- my message was to care and to push or to pull people in a direction as humans, you know, but based on kind of the colder, harder facts of the data. And if you can, I think that's an approach that it doesn't make it personal. The person you support, you care for, you want to see be well and succeed. And the data helps inform where you're trying to push them, but not necessarily how you treat them, if that makes sense.

Cyril Goddeeris: So, I want to just move onto adversity. So, a focus around equity continues to be a major part of the conversation off the court. Last year in the NBA bubble really started the lead and its player really took a lead for standing up for racial and social justice. What does it mean to see an entire organization stand together? And how do you affect change? And how do you think about this as your role as a coach?

Steve Nash: Well, I think it's incredible that the NBA has taken a leadership stance in this. I think it's, you know, it's time. And I think great leadership from Adam Silver is behind all of this or at the forefront of all of this. And then, you know, to have a board of governors or ownership groups that have been able to put aside their politics or whatever it may be to say, "I support this moment" or, you know, allowing the league to represent something that has been politicized but isn't political at heart.

So, you know, we live in a society that has a lot of growing to do. And for the NBA to take a stand and do what's right, it makes me incredibly proud. And I think that Adam Silver's ability to allow the players to be themselves and have a platform is a part of why our business is successful. Because fans get to see who the players are.

Cyril Goddeeris: So, thinking about platforms a bit, you know, you personally started your Steve Nash Foundation. You know, the organization focuses on health and personal development, education in underserved communities. Why was this important to you? What drew your focus here?

Steve Nash: You know, I think it all started way back with my parents. You know? They always taught us that it's a global community and that, you know, there is a lot of inequality and

life isn't fair. And to try to bridge that gap for people that are underserved is, you know, is a part of being human. And so, you know, when I-- you know, I always had that in my back of my mind, of being fair, of being caring, of, you know, being a part of a community of, you know, seeking or being, you know, sensitive to the plight of others. That was something that I think my parents taught me and stayed with me. It was important to me.

When I got to the NBA, you know, it felt fairly early in the community relations movement. But at the Phoenix Suns, we were doing stuff in the community. And it resonated with me. And you know, I wanted to be a part of that, and I wanted to get out there and do things as a young player and help and send a message that we care. And so, that led me to think, well, hey, you know, I have this platform and this opportunity to start my own foundation and to be able to help people where I can and bring people together.

And so, you know, as a-- I guess it was 17 years ago now, started my foundation and my family's foundation. And it's been-- you know, I didn't have something in my family where I was like we have been affected by this. Or so for me it was like what was near and dear to my heart? And children were always-- you know, I always just loved kids. Their innocence. Their, you know, potential. Their dependence on support. And how they-- investing in kids, caring for them, can lead to, you know, not only incredible results, but protecting them from, you know, the negative aspects of life or society. And so, that was the seed. It was like, well, if I don't have a cause, let's make children, newborn to high school kids, our cause. And so, it was a love, a bit of a broad lens, but we focalized it in different ways. And it's just been a great experience to bring people together, to be a part of a team. Because anytime we do something, you know, we bring others in to help and support. And to have that kind of larger group doing well by others has been incredibly rewarding.

Cyril Goddeeris: Well Steve, I want to thank you from all of our colleagues at GS for joining us today.

Steve Nash: I had a blast.

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