

First of all, I speak for myself and not the NBA. My opinion really doesn't matter on this issue because it is governed by the Collective Bargaining Agreement and I can assure you that I have minimal influence on what is included in that document.

If it were up to me, I would raise the age limit to 22 or when your class graduates from college. Why ?

It's not because there are not 18 or 19 year olds who can't play in the NBA. There always have been, and there always will be. Doing what is right for the NBA is about far more than basketball talent.

My logic is simple.

If a kid is NBA ready to play at 18 or 19, he will be NBA ready at 22. They don't forget how to play basketball and they don't get worse. What does change considerably between the ages of 18 and 22 is the maturity level of the kids. Ask any 22 year old in college if they are more "worldly" and better prepared to deal with life post college than they were when they were 18 or 19.

The ability to better deal with the real world is of huge importance for anyone entering a profession. I'm not saying every college graduate is automatically mature. They aren't, but again, those who are immature at 22, were probably far less mature at 18 or 19.

From the perspective of an NBA owner, maturity is far harder to qualify than talent. Can he manage the personal side of his life ? When friends, relatives and hangers on are coming out of the woodwork asking for something. I know that when I first started making great money, it was difficult for me, in my late 20s to deal with who to say no to. How is a 19 year old going to say no to people who he has grown up around and are still his close friends ? How is he going to deal with the gold diggers ? A 1 or 2 week "Scared Straight" class by the NBA isn't going to do the job.

Can he deal with all the obligations that come with living on your own, and being in a job that requires you traveling more often than not ?

Does he have an understanding of financial principals ? To a 19 year old kid without financial training, a million dollar contract makes him a millionaire. There is no concept that 50pct goes to taxes and that by the time he pays his bills, he has a great job, that pays great money, but he isn't at a level that allows him to spend without limit. Unfortunately, there are far too many agents that won't have the tough love conversations with their clients until its too late.

Which means that all the emotional strain that comes along with being 19 and entering a new profession is introduced to the team. It becomes our obligation to help the player deal with all of this. We get the questions about whether or not he should buy a gun because his buddy tells him he needs one. How to set up a checking account or to get a new drivers license or get a passport. How to deal with breaking up with a girlfriend who now wants money. And that's not the worst of it.

Raising the minimum age is not about talent, its about maturity. Maturity matters to this league. Mature players are marketable players. Mature players generate far less strain on the league. Mature players can take care of themselves. Mature players understand the business of the NBA and how they can positively impact it to their own benefit.

Look at the two big black eye events that NBA has suffered the past several years. How many of those players are "early entrants" ? Maturity matters.

When people would talk about NBA image problems, and you ask for specific players, its not about black vs white, tattoos vs non, its about mature vs immature. Its that simple.

The younger the player the greater the maturity risk. The greater the maturity risk, the greater the risk to the entire future of the NBA.

I don't know how we can measure maturity and make it a covenant of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. The closest definable measure we have is age. Which is exactly why I'm all for a 22 year old age minimum.

Given all the comments, I wanted to add an update here:

There are plenty of companies that will only hire college graduates. Others will only hire Phds. I think it would be best if we only hired those 22 or older. I dont think it would hurt our business a bit, in fact, i think it would help the business of the NBA considerably.

What most people fail to realize is that working for the NBA is not a right, its a very unique opportunity that is very rewarding, **if and only if the NBA thrives as a business. The real question to ask isnt whether or not kids should be able to go to work for us. The real question is how do you keep from killing their golden goose so they have some place to work.** The NBA has dug and redeemed itself from enough holes. Im a believer that we pre-empt as many problems as possible and this is one key way to do it.