This column started out with discussing contract negotiations and extensions, but soon turned into the coronavirus phenomena that has hit not only our hoops bubble - but the entire planet, killing humans, attacking families, and causing millions to suffer from unemployment.

It's difficult to tiptoe around contract talks without name dropping, but I'll try to keep things fluent.

It's uncommon for teams to reload during the season, now more than ever. Sure, it happens, but not as often as you think. A lot depends on the identity of the coach, and budgets, that are influenced by sponsors and revenue. There's also a joker in town that goes by the name of "CORONAVIRUS"!!!!

What the hell is going on? No more ball in 2019-2020?! The damages and financial losses can destroy families. No one saw this coming. No one knows when it ends. But for sure the outbreak has put a long pause on teams' abilities to negotiate contracts for 2020-21. Even talks I was in for agreements have hit a roadblock.
People in basketball have short memories. Players or coaches are as good as their last game - good or bad - that's usually what fans remember going into the offseason.

Here's some advice I have for fans or media trying to get ahead the "news breaking" game - a tactic I used as a reporter. I would be active and communicate with multiple sources - not just one source. I would reach out to almost all before games and fish to see if any special guests are in the building: NBA personnel, agents, families?

When an agent flies in to see a client it usually means the following: 1. To visit a client, which is very important in maintaining and building relationships.

2. To recruit potential players
- teammates or others from teams around the league.

3. To negotiate a contract extension

4. To negotiate a settlement or termination
or .. put out any existing fire.

One European agent visited Israel some weeks ago and shortly after Maccabi announced the contact extensions for Scottie Wilbekin and Othello Hunter. Tel Aviv coach Giannis Sferopoulos' brother is also his representative. He too was in Israel recently, and then Maccabi announced a new deal for the Greek tactician. Extensions are easier to close when the club knows it has a coach signed for the following season. Otherwise, the club will sign player X, but the coach leaves and the new coach isn't interested in player X, but wants player Y. Unnecessary headaches

When Hapoel Tel Aviv cut Malcolm Griffin toward the end of 2019. It didn't take long to reach a settlement agreement, bcuz the market was open and he had options - signing soon after back with his former club Kolossos in Greece. On the flip side, Hapoel made another change recently as Sek Henry replaced Mark Lyons. Given that most signing deadlines have expired and season’s have been cancelled due to the outbreak of coronavirus, Lyons has no alternative. He is still in Israel, stuck, before he is able to return home because he hasn't reached a settlement with Hapoel. He wants his entire contract, while the club wants to settle. That’s where an agent has to be on his “A Game” to help all parties come away satisfied.
One Euroleague GM gave me his insight on the difference between a good and bad agent. He said, I never judge an agent in the offseason when we sign deals because everyone is happy. Agents are evaluated on the rainy days, when the club wants to cut the player, and how accommodating or smoothly the agent is or isn’t in helping resolve the situation.

Here's a little peak into a situation with my clients. Tyrus McGee is in France doing very well and drawing a lot of interest for next season. Malik Dime is a US-SEN center and an All-Star in Greece for Lavrio, so multiple teams from Spain and France have placed offers already for next season. He also has significant interest from Germany, as does Samme Givens - the best forward in Finland with Karhu Basket and ex-vet in the Israeli National League. Also rookie scorer Namon Wright in the British Basketball League (not to be confused with THE REAL BBL LOL) has been gauging attention from German teams. Now we just have to make a decision on the best fit for them to make the next jump in their careers - if we ever have a season in 2020-21.

Shane Larkin got his Turkish passport and will surely become a $2M net player next season, so be on the lookout for his movements - Barcelona? Anadolu Efes? Fenerbahce? (I'm not sure he wants to play for Zeljko Obradovic). Vasilije Micic is the best point guard in Euroleague and his NBA rights are owned by the Philadelphia 76ers, who also met him recently in Munich. He signed a 3-year extension last season with Anadolu Efes during the Final Four in Baskonia, but later received a higher offer from Olimpia Milano for more money - so there are some sacrifices one makes by signing early.
In semi-related news, Kosovo center Lis Shoshi played last season in Israel with Maccabi Ashdod for $50,000 NET and signed in the BBL with s.Oliver Wuerzburg for $100,000 NET. However, he ran out of luck and got injured over the summer while playing for the Kosovo national team. He busted his knees and his deal was terminated - but he is a really good guy, and hopefully he is able to bounce back soon.

Another aspect that has influence on signings and-or extensions are financial demands. As an agent who will always tell clients what they NEED to hear, rather what they WANT to hear, I know the one's that stick with me are strong-minded, believe in themselves, are in our relationship, and don't fall for dream-sellers of rival agents.

I'd say 80% of teams build a roster around locals, then move to affordable imports, then finalise the squad with a gem they've been coveting for a while. What does that mean? During the season most agents inflate the price tag of their clients, believing they can secure bigger contracts down the road. It's a poker game, but you must be smart, aware, and in control with how you operate or your client gets screwed out of a potential deal. Normally, players during the season ask for a very inflated number, towards the end of the season that number drops, then in the offseason it is still high, and sometimes unreachable for some teams ... but as time goes on, with the NBA Summer League in the rear view mirror, and training camp looming around the corner, all of the sudden player’s market value drops significantly and it only makes the agent-player look bad, bcuz the team all along stuck to the budget, maybe went a little bit over. but it just causes the agent to lose credibility and look more like a joker than a poker master. I tell players all the time - there are too many good players and not enough good jobs. Chase good situations, not good money. Good money comes from good situations. Victor Rudd ($350,000 at Maccabi to $10,000 a month at Würzburg. Jordan Crawford from NBA, China to getting cut from Israel to a tryout in Bamberg. Donald Sloan from turning down $60,000 a month
at Maccabi, to China, to Telekom Bonn. Oder Isaiah Briscoe from the Magic, to turning down deals in $200,000 NET to warming the bench at Ratiopharm to the low level Polish League - just to name a few interesting situations).

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Is the world coming to an end? I honestly have no idea. But I do know that our beloved basketball community is suffering and our little hoop balloon has pop’d. I can’t even begin to explain what these past few weeks have looked like for me as a player representative. But not just for me. Also for the players and the clubs. This is a once in a lifetime situation that NO ONE knows how to handle. Games behind closed doors? No fans? No NBA? No March Madness? No Euroleague. No Final Four. No domestic Leagues. No minor leagues? Even my bullshit regional league where we play twice a week and are ranked #2 (13-2) has been canceled. WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?!

I have already cancelled my flight to the Final Four in Cologne. I’m cancelling my trip to the Las Vegas Summer League because it seems the NBA season will be pushed back. What’s next? My nieces in the U.S. and my teammates here are in quarantine (house arrest).

In this time of crisis I’ve learned that it is paramount for me to be the voice of reason and responsible when communicating with my clients, because we are all in this pickle together. I’ve been sending players home from various leagues and no one can tell us IF or WHEN they’d resume. Ever. In Israel, like in New York and many other countries, schools and daycares have been cancelled. So in case our work load wasn’t enough to manage, I also have a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old at home with me 24/7 running around like life is great. Well, I guess in their eyes, it is, but it really isn’t. The most rehashed conversation I’ve had with teams and clients is about money. Their money. My money. Our money. I do the best for my clients, always, but some things are also out of our control. You know the phrase - Man plans and God laughs.

Well, I think what will eventually happen is that teams will pay players a portion of their remaining salaries, while more established and bigger clubs might even cover all monies because they have a reputation to maintain, but going forward the flow of money will dry up. But whose fault is that, though?! What came first, the chicken or the egg?! These situations are tough for everyone. I pulled clients out of Italy, Greece, Portugal, Great Britain, Spain, and I’m sure by the time you read this - I’ll have sent more home.
At this point, I’d like to wish everyone to stay healthy, clean and safe. Wash your hands. It sounds silly and normal, but if I’d have a Euro for each time I went to the bathroom at a basketball game and saw people urinate and walk right out the door as if there’s no water in the world to wash your hands - I’d be a retired millionaire. Be sanitary. Be professional.

WASH YOUR HANDS!