

In Dominica Republic, VI Senior Men National Basketball Team is Challenged by Covid-19-Induced 'Bubble', But Vow to Compete

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PUNTA CANA, Dominican Republic – The Virgin Islands Senior Men National team is currently in the "bubble" in the 2022 AmeriCup Qualifiers played in Punta Cana, DR and are finding life a little bit difficult, a release issued Friday has made known. The "bubble" has been the term used by most sports leagues during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"As much as I saw other bubbles on television, you don't truly understand what they went through," said Virgin Islands Head Coach Donald Bough. "The reality shows us that the restrictions are difficult because you're doing things you don't normally do. However, they are doable."

Some of the strict protocols faced by the team are each player over a ten-day-period must have three negative PCR test results and must stay in isolation in their hotel rooms, except for practice and games, throughout their stay. A security escort is needed with any movement within the facility.

“The main thing about the bubble is you don’t know,” added Bough. “FIBA is learning as we are learning. Since this is their first bubble not everything was factored in but should get better in time. FIBA is trying to keep us safe from everything and return us to home how we came.”

As for the eleven players that made the journey from St. Croix to participate in a games, the main event is the game versus the home team, Dominican Republic, on Sunday at 5:30pm on ESPN+.

“I am proud of this team,” stated a jovial Bough. “The mindset is that we are here to play a game and to do whatever it takes to compete. The team has complied with FIBA protocols even when things changed hour-by-hour or even minute-by-minute. We’ve battled through frustrations with the sudden changes, but our goal remains the same.”

Bough added, “The chemistry we’ve built up over this experience, even though we don’t have our full talent, has brought the team together. We’ve had a situation when a couple rooms have to stay in isolation and had not a full complement at practice.”

The players representing the territory are overseas professionals Walter Hodge (Egypt), Georgio Milligan (Sweden), Deon Edwin (Ukraine), LaRon Smith (Spain), Ivan Aska (Israel), Xavier Richards (Kosovo), Jason Perry-Murray (Georgia), combined with local talent Jervan Jackson (St. Thomas), Devon Peltier (St. Thomas), Leonardo Castillo (St. Croix) and new blood in former Mississippi State point guard Trivante Bloodman.

“We have the same problem for years in the lack of size,” added Bough. “The guard rotation is our strength; we have a core of guards that are solid.”

Another factor arising from the bubble that will be missed by players and coaching staffs is the roaring noise of the fans.

“The sixth man factor of the crowd, similar to the NBA bubble, will be missed by the home team,” Bough said. “The crowd motivation all players strive to get is not there. In the NBA the missing fan support allowed the games to be more even and that is in our favor. However, on our end the anticipation of quieting the audience is gone, but I like where we sit.”

The Dominican Republic team is in the midst of a 7-game winning streak versus the team from the USVI.

“We just have to find our tough and gritty style,” said Virgin Islands Assistant Coach Kevin Sheppard. “We have actually switched styles with the Hispaniola team and it’s up to us to regain our form.”

“We are going to compete and are going into the game with the mindset we are going to win,” said an emphatic Bough. “We will not be intimidated and show the world that we could hold our own.”

The Virgin Islands team is sponsored by VI Lottery, the V.I. Dept. of Tourism and the Dept. of Sports, Parks and Recreation. The team sent special thanks to Governor Albert Bryan and Chief of Staff Karl Knight.