

Prokhorov Introduces Moscow to the Nets

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Prokhorov, left on the bench, watching a training session of the New Jersey Nets basketball team on Sunday. **Tatyana Makeyeva**

New Jersey Nets owner Mikhail Prokhorov has presented his team to the Russian public, meeting many of the players for the first time and reiterating a vow to turn them into a championship-winning team in five years.

The billionaire, who took over ownership in May, hosted a weekend exhibition in Moscow where Nets stars including Jordan Farmar and Devin Harris participated in training drills with local children aged 8 to 18.

Prokhorov high-fived with team members when they were introduced, and later reiterated ambitious plans to secure a playoff place in the coming season and to win the championship by 2015.

"Our task is to become champions in five years. I hope we'll do it," Prokhorov said.

For on-the-court success, he'll have his work cut out. The Nets posted a disastrous 12-70 record last season, and missing out on LeBron James combined with a disappointing draft leaves many observers wondering exactly what will make them contenders this time around.

The promise of a new stadium in Brooklyn, a new coaching team led by Avery Johnson, and the raw aggression of a youthful roster, Prokhorov insisted, would ensure that "with a big fight, we'll be in the playoffs next season."

Success may partly hinge on the acquisition of Carmelo Anthony. When asked, Prokhorov hinted that the Denver Nuggets all-star was still a target despite The Associated Press being told last month by a person close to discussions that the deal was dead.

"We will use any opportunity to make the team stronger," Prokhorov said, refusing to comment more specifically.

His ambition was already evident in the coach.

"We want Nets basketball to be the cream of the crop, of the NBA," Johnson said in an interview, calling the playoffs target "realistic" but warning that "nothing's going to happen overnight."

Johnson promised a more defense-minded team with more solid three-point shooting this season.

Harris, meanwhile, was upbeat about Prokhorov, praising him for setting the team "in the right direction."

"He's a great owner. We can only go up from here," he said. "Last year was a drag. ... We're correcting our mistakes and getting better," he said.

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