

Unions rip mayor 'double standard'

BY THOMAS TRACY, LARRY MCSHANE AND MICHAEL ELSSEN-ROONEY NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

It's a slam dunk for All-Star hoopster Kyrie Irving — yet still a possible career-ending foul for city workers.

The NYPD's largest police union ripped Mayor Adams for selective enforcement Thursday after the city's private-sector vaccine mandate was scrapped for athletes and performers, with the unvaccinated Brooklyn Nets star cleared to play in the Barclays Center while nine police officers who declined to get jabbed were already fired.

"If the mandate isn't necessary for famous people, then it's not necessary for the cops who are protecting our city in the middle of a crime crisis," fumed Police Benevolent Association President Patrick Lynch.

The PBA was joined in its outrage by a cross-section of city unions: The United Federation of Teachers, the Correction Officers' Benevolent Association, city EMTs and paramedics in Local 2507, the police Lieutenants Benevolent Association, the Sanitation Department and the Detectives' Endowment Association.

"It's unfortunate there is a double standard here, one for VIP celebrities making millions and one for the workers barely getting by," said Local 2507 head Oren Barzilay. "These millionaires are able to go back to work, but how does that remedy the city workers that ... aren't seeing the same exemptions? It truly is a tale of two cities."

By lifting the mandate, Adams will allow the high-scoring Irving to suit up at home for the first time this season on Sunday while clearing the way for unvaccinated players with the Yankees and Mets to play at Yankee Stadium and CitiField once the baseball season starts.

The move also means Irving will be available for all Nets games during the playoffs.

In contrast, NYPD officials said, another of its 37 civilian employees can watch the contests on TV in their free time after their dismissals.

"We're told the vaccination mandate is necessary because they're following the science," said Lieutenants Benevolent Association head Lou Turco. "Where is the science that supports immunity if you're able to make free throws or throw a baseball 95 miles an hour?"

"I'm not surprised," he continued. "It is hypocritical to allow an athlete not to get vaccinated while forcing police officers to get vaccinated to keep their jobs."

Irving signed a four-year, \$136 million contract with the Nets in 2019. A rookie police officer's starting salary is \$42,000 a year and city emergency medical technicians can start with an annual paycheck as low as \$39,386.

A United Federation of Teachers spokeswoman added the union's voice to the angry City Hall critics.

"The city should not create exceptions to its vaccination requirements without compelling reason," the spokeswoman said. "If the rules are going to be suspended, particularly for people with influence, then the UFT and other city unions are ready to discuss how exceptions could be applied to city workers."

Only city-based pro athletes and performers are exempt, with the private sector mandate remaining in effect for other businesses.

The Broadway League, representing 41 city theaters, said it will continue its current plan to require vaccinations for audience members, performers, backstage crew and theater staff through at least the end of April.

"Broadway theaters anticipate no change in our protocols based on this announcement," said League President Charlotte St. Martin. "We continue to evaluate our COVID safety protocols for audiences, cast and crew, in concert with our unions and medical experts."

Lynch and other police unions have repeatedly sued the city over the public employee vaccination mandate that went into effect last Oct. 29 requiring all NYPD officers to get the life-saving jab or be sent home without pay.

Some 5,000 cops who requested exemptions for medical or religious reasons remained on the job while awaiting a final determination on their cases.

Critics denounced the vaccine mandate as arbitrary, citing Adams' decision to clear the way for unvaccinated professional athletes to return to the city's arenas and ballparks as longtime city employees face the axe.

"Talented detectives with irreplaceable experience were lost because of the mandate," said Paul DiGiacomo, president of the Detectives' Endowment Association. "Athletes and performers more important during a crime wave than NYPD detectives? He must be kidding."

Restrictions for performers and athletes in local venues will be rescinded in time for Opening Day at Yankee Stadium and Citi Field, a move which will keep the city's unvaccinated baseball players from missing home games like Irving after refusing to get the shot.

The decision came on the heels of Adams' announcement Tuesday that he plans to lift the mask mandate for toddlers in city daycare centers on April 4.

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