



Chauncey Billups assumes the role of leader for Team USA

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"He's been through every experience as a player," Team USA coach Mike Krzyzewski says of 33-year-old point guard Chauncey Billups (4).

A time will come during the world championships in Turkey — a close game, possibly with a medal at stake — when Team USA, from players to coaches, will rely on [Denver Nuggets](#) guard [Chauncey Billups](#).

For his experience. For his knowledge. For his leadership.

Billups, 33, is the elder statesman of a team with an average age of nearly 25. He is to this U.S. team what [Dallas Mavericks](#) guard [Jason Kidd](#) was to the 2008 gold medal-winning Olympic team.

When the USA opens play Saturday against Croatia (noon ET, [ESPN Classic](#)), Billups will be "as important as anybody on our team because he's the leader of

the team," coach [Mike Krzyzewski](#) said.

"He's been through every experience as a player, and he's been successful," Krzyzewski said. "He and I have a very close relationship, and we talk about the team all the time."

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That relationship began in earnest in 2007, when Billups worked out with Team USA in preparation for the 2008 Games.

"We have a mutual respect for one another," Billups said. "We can always be honest and frank with each other."

A family matter forced Billups to withdraw from Olympic consideration, but he maintained an interest in international basketball.

When USA Basketball Chairman [Jerry Colangelo](#) began compiling names for the 2010 worlds, Billups was at the top of the list.

Colangelo needed him, knowing that Kidd, [Los Angeles Lakers](#) guard [Kobe Bryant](#) and [Miami Heat](#) forward [LeBron James](#) and Heat guard [Dwyane Wade](#), among other big stars, would not be playing in Turkey.

"Even though these guys are really good players on their NBA teams, this is just a different situation," Krzyzewski said. "And having Chauncey there to

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settle everyone down, give confidence, know game situations, it's invaluable."

Billups started in each of the team's four exhibition victories in the past two weeks, averaging 10.3 points. But scoring isn't his only job. The USA has scorers: Oklahoma City Thunder forward [Kevin Durant](#), Chicago Bulls guard [Derrick Rose](#), Memphis Grizzlies forward [Rudy Gay](#), Los Angeles Clippers guard [Eric Gordon](#) and Indiana Pacers swingman [Danny Granger](#).

Coaches love having players on the court who are an extension of them. That is Billups. Sometimes it's easier for players to hear criticism or instruction from a peer than from a coach.

Billups said if four guys are playing hard defensively and one is not, he has no problem calling out the player. Or if the physical international play that is not allowed in the NBA bothers Durant, Billups can use his calming influence.

"Knowing how I lead and how I go about it makes it a little better for the coach," Billups said.

- The [Philadelphia 76ers](#) advised Argentine forward [Andres Nocioni](#) not to play in the worlds because of his injured left ankle.

Around the hardwood: Former [Cleveland Cavaliers](#) general manager [Danny Ferry](#) has returned to the [San Antonio Spurs](#) as vice president of basketball operations. Ferry played for the Spurs from 2000-2003 and was in their front office before joining the Cavaliers. ... [Toronto Raptors](#) assistant general manager Masai Ujiri is the Nuggets' new GM, replacing Mark Warkentien, *The Denver Post* reported. Ujiri previously had been a Denver scout.

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