

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Jalen Williams

Press Conference



Q. Jalen, just the experience that you guys went through as a group, the connectedness of this team, what do you think it will mean for you guys moving forward just knowing that you're at the doorstep of what you're building?

JALEN WILLIAMS: In the moment it kind of sucks. Everybody probably feels like we left a lot on the table, and I think that's a really good thing. My first year, we had like a really average year and kind of got bounced out before even kind of getting into the playoffs.

So to have the year we had now and be disappointed is kind of a really good thing that we did. It's something we're going to build on and brought us really closer together. You can't get better with these experiences without having them, so it's definitely a good thing we were able to kind of go through this together as a group.

Especially being young, I think it will serve us really well down the stretch.

Q. Jalen, what did the playoffs feel like compared to your expectations going in?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Probably about the same. It was physical. It was really competitive. It's definitely like -- there's definitely a change from the regular season to the playoffs. Like I said, yeah, it's way more physical. Guys are playing like it could be their last game. So everybody is just kind of ready to give it their all.

So it was really fun playing in that environment. It kind of opens up what you need to do in the off-season to kind of be prepared for next time you're in it.

Q. Last night Mark said he wants that feeling after the game, that pain to be an investment towards the future. I was just wondering, when he told you that last night, how would you describe that feeling after the game? Is there part of you that wants to preserve that?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I mean, it didn't feel good. There's no other team I would rather have that feeling with for sure, just because I know there's a bunch of motivated guys in the locker room with me.

It's a feeling I'm going to carry throughout the summer and carry with me the rest of my career, being the first time that I'm in the playoffs. Just use it as a chip on my shoulder and kind of press through that way. It's something that's going to motivate the rest of the guys and myself.

It's good we're having that feeling early, something we can always remember and try to be better for.

Q. Shai mentioned there's no other team he'd rather experience that loss with. Mark said he wanted to continue to just be around you guys. What makes this group so special?

JALEN WILLIAMS: We're really connected. That's probably a boring answer, but like we have a really close-knit group of guys that you can't really -- it's hard to really kind of replicate that or find, and it happened organically.

A lot of it's through just being drafted together or being signed together. So it's just one of those things where organically it happened and we kind of got lucky that we like each other. Then I think it kind of -- it grew into something more. I think last year really helped us get close. When you struggle together, it kind of brings out everybody's true colors, and everybody's true colors kind of matched up well. We were able to get closer as a team, and that was kind of the result we got this year.

Q. With this team, nobody's gone out of their way to put their needs first. Like you could have easily been like, I want to establish myself in the NBA. Shai could have been, I want to be an MVP this year. This all just happened naturally. What all went into that? What all went into you just continuing to stay within the team and not focusing on yourself?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think for me personally, it's I want to see everybody else on the team do well too. Like I say, we have a lot of good dudes on the team that you can't help but root for and hope for the best.

From my perspective, it's just being able to give myself up for them, and hopefully that gets reciprocated. I think it did. Everybody had a really good year through the ups and downs of the season. Regardless I think we all kind of stuck together.

I think when everybody wants to see everybody else do well, it allows us to be comfortable and kind of play to our strengths and be the best version of ourselves, and we were able to do that this year. Yeah, I have no problem giving myself up for those guys and trying to do the right thing on and off the court. I think that's kind of what transpired.

Q. How does it show up in a guy like Josh, where he has to go to the bench and other guys come in? How does it show up in that situation?

JALEN WILLIAMS: It's really impressive. There's a lot of guys in the NBA that could have made a really big deal about that and ruined the camaraderie of the team. He did a really good job of buying into that and just being ready when his number was called.

A lot of guys have had to do that all year, and we've let it be known to him that that's really selfless, and we really appreciate him for that, being willing to do that.

Like you said, when you come into the NBA and have the success he has and obviously we get in a big moment and we kind of move our lineup around, I think to be able to take himself out of that equation and kind of look what's best for the team, I think was really commendable. Like I said, just kind of being ready when your number is called, he did a good job of that. Being willing to do that, it makes everybody else be willing too.

Q. Josh said being around you guys -- he had a lot of ups and downs this year. Being around you guys, he talked about how much he loves you guys. Could you sense him needing that to get over those down times?

JALEN WILLIAMS: For sure. Like you said, he had a lot of ups and downs this year. Probably a lot of guys can't really play through that and be productive the way he was. I don't want to say it was us, but understanding when someone kind of needs you there -- you know, we're around each other however many months out of the year, like six, seven months out of the year, and it's like every day.

So I think if we can make his life a little easier when he comes to play basketball, it's something we were willing to do and tried to do.

Like I said, a lot of it's organic too. It's just us being us. We're not going out of our way to do anything, but I think when basketball is your therapy with guys you like playing with, I think it's really fun. I'm happy to hear that we made his life a little easier.

Q. I imagine you saw throughout the playoffs maybe some criticism here and there, just about your online presence throughout the playoffs. What do you make of that, and what do you say to those people?

JALEN WILLIAMS: It doesn't bother me at all. I got to play in the playoffs, be a key piece on the youngest team in history to be a 1 seed and win a playoff series, and compete in the last one to go to six, obviously have a chance to play in the Western Conference Finals.

Experiences like that will make me better. Criticism, I could care less about. It doesn't really bother me. I go back to a very good life right after we're done with this interview, so it doesn't really bother me at all.

Q. Have you found a way to navigate that balance between wanting to be online but also being here and being present?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah. I think in the playoffs it's probably just heightened because there's not as many teams playing, so now the focus is a little changed. I got off a little bit. I wasn't on Twitter as much. I was still there, but I still saw some stuff.

Like I said, it doesn't really hold any value. It's behind the keyboard. There's also a lot of love on social media too. I think in the heat of it you want to be consumed so much with people who are possibly preying on your downfall or hating, but at the same time, I got a lot of true authentic love and appreciation for what we've been doing all year. So you've kind of just got to take it with a grain of salt.

I try and just use it as motivation and go from there. I think all year nothing really changed trying to navigate my way through social media and try and use it as a positive force.

Q. Do you think the barking will carry over into next year, and do you hope it does?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, I hope it continues. I think it's cool. I've been on record saying I've been barked at at Target or Starbucks.

(Laughter).

We could probably chill on that a little bit. I think it's a really cool thing. It's like our team thing. Kind of going

back to the social media thing, like people were hating on that too, but I think it's just a really fun thing that we didn't even try to do. It just kind of ended up happening.

Somebody's mom was barking during the game. So it's like one of those things that's really cool. So I hope it happens. It's kind of like our identity. It's been cool. I think a lot of our identity hasn't been forced either. A lot of it is just like us being goofy and then it kind of ends up being something pretty cool.

I enjoy it. I hope it continues. I'll keep doing like little T-shirts with pregame things. Nothing in that department is going to change.

Q. First Team All-League, congratulations.

JALEN WILLIAMS: Thank you.

Q. They got MVP. I don't know how you feel about that. I personally liked Perry. Either way, I think Lu got like 13 --

JALEN WILLIAMS: Lu should have been higher.

Q. What's your opinion on him getting snubbed First Team?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think he is a First Team snub. I don't want to say anything that's going to get me out of graces with being the First Team. Fashion is subjective, I will say that. And LeagueFits, I'm cool with them too.

It's just one of those things, it's really like preference based. I would say just wear whatever you want. Like I said, fashion is subjective. Everybody's going to have a different opinion on what it is.

Shai got MVP. I think he should have gotten the actual MVP. So I think it was good that he got the LeagueFits one. I think it's a cool thing.

Q. How does like you being First Team this year, how does that parlay into you getting more opportunities in the fashion space? How much are you looking forward to that?

JALEN WILLIAMS: It should be fun. Paris sounds exhausting right now. It definitely opens up different doors, when the basketball starts bouncing, whenever that is, it's cool to have other outlets and stuff like that.

I haven't given the fashion week and all that stuff too much thought yet, but it's something that opens a lot of doors, something that I like to do outside of basketball. Especially

when I got in the NBA, I kind of found it more as an outlet. I kind of found myself in my closet just kind of like trying different stuff on and doing that. Just kind of like a release, something else besides basketball. So it's been good for me.

Hopefully somebody pays for my flight to go out there. But, yeah, I think it's like -- it's a good thing. I think it kind of adds to something I'd like to do when basketball's done, and we all kind of know how fashion is kind of integrating from basketball and how those worlds are colliding.

Q. You mentioned after the series that you sort of know what you need to work on. How do you sort of decipher those things because there's only so many hours in the day and so many basketball skills. How do you figure out what's number one and continue with that?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I forgot who I heard this from when I was in like eighth grade, but it was just like every summer you try and pick something, one thing no matter what it is, and get really good at that. And then try and hone in the rest of the skills that you have.

So like this playoffs, I won't disclose what I'm going to do, but this playoffs I'm going to pick one thing. Okay, this was what was more difficult for me to do, and I'm going to really hone in on that all summer. As the summer progresses, I'm going to get really good at that one thing and hone in the rest of the skills that I already have.

I had a really good year, so just trying to add to that and keep those same skills and just get really elite at one of my weaknesses that I think -- I won't even say a weakness. One of the things that I'm not as good at and kind of get really good at that and then add to it.

Q. Have you decided on that, or is there like an evaluation period?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah.

Q. What was that for you last summer?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Coming into this year? Understanding my spots. So last year was -- I watched a ton of film. I think, if you kind of watched last year too, I didn't even really -- a big part of my game was kind of like bumping and getting to that little elbow pull-up. I did not have that last summer, coming into this year. That wasn't something I really did. But it was somewhere that I was ending up on the floor a lot, and just kind of like within our offense I was somewhere where I was kind of getting stuck and picking the ball up and not really knowing what to do.

That was something I added to my game.

I feel like I only shot like one free throw a game, but being able to draw fouls a little bit this year and being able to draw contact, I felt that added a lot to my game. I felt like I finished really well this year.

So I was able to add those two things, and now that's something this summer that will be on the back end of that keeping that sharp and getting better at something else this year.

Q. (On how he finds his favorite spots on the floor.)

JALEN WILLIAMS: Trial and error. The more you play, as a basketball player, you know what you're comfortable with and what you're uncomfortable with. Then the goal at the end of the day is to blend the two so people can't really see it.

A lot of it is just looking at film and remembering how it felt to shoot certain shots. It's kind of hard to explain. It's like one of those things with sports, it's like you're going to really be the only person that actually knows how you feel in those situations. So just trying to watch all my shots and shots I didn't shoot and then just trying to remember what made me comfortable shooting this one and what made me uncomfortable shooting that one.

Q. Kenrich in an endearing way said you're a different type of guy. What do you think he meant by that?

JALEN WILLIAMS: How did he say it? (Laughter).

Was he smiling?

Q. Yes.

JALEN WILLIAMS: Oh, okay. I don't know. Hopefully it was maybe basketball related. I don't even know. Maybe I'll have a better answer if I watch the video. Hopefully it was something good, though. We have a good relationship. I ask him questions just about being in the NBA, being a pro.

He was big in the series too. That was who I was talking to a lot as well. Probably him and Shai, just about navigating the playoffs. When I was struggling a little bit, that was somebody that was kind of talking me up and keeping me engaged in the game and did that. So salute to him for sure.

He was harping on just continuing to play the right way, being aggressive, and not losing my defensive prowess

that I kind of have, being a two-way, trying to be an elite two-way player. So he was big on that this whole playoff run and throughout the season.

Q. Where have you seen Mark grow in your two years here as coach?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Obviously -- it's probably a little harder just for you guys to know just because you guys aren't in the war room. But scheme-wise, I think he's been really good. That comes from understanding the personnel that he has on the floor.

He's been throwing in so many different lineups and giving us all different looks with each other, that it really kind of helped us later in the season to be able to play in some stretches where like Lu, for example, is in foul trouble. Now Cason has to come in. That wasn't something new that we had in. I thought he did a really good job of preparing us at the beginning of the year.

So I would definitely say scheme-wise he's been really good, just kind of understanding us as players. It just comes with time. Obviously the more coach and players know, the more you know about them. He's been really good with us this year and last year.

Q. The other day you were mic'd up, said that Shai was good at the lob. You were successful with the three lobs yesterday, but he wasn't. What do you think of that?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I was very shocked, and it was a big-time lob. Actually, he's a great passer. It was very out of context. We throw a lob every day, before every game, during like our warmups, and he's never thrown a good one. So that was where that came from. But he is a good passer. I think he averages like seven assists or something, so he can pass the ball.

Q. Regarding the lobs, in that moment before the next play, obviously it altered the game. What did that play feel like, just the magnitude of it?

JALEN WILLIAMS: It was a big play. I thought we were going to win.

I think for him to even pass the ball in that situation where he had 36 at the time, to be somebody in his position, you can't even get mad if he shot it. For him to trust us and obviously to Chet who got the dunk, to throw it and make the play was big. It just shows our team. We have a lot of trust in each other to hit shots and do that whole thing. He got squeezed at the top of the key with 1:10 left, and he threw it to J-Will and he threw it to me and I got a three on

the right wing.

I think just him being able to get off the ball and do that and make plays, I think we got a rebound, and he kicked it to Lu by our bench. Lu got a three. He didn't even make it, and then he threw it to him again. Threw it to him two times in a row. I think that kind just speaks to the trust he had in all of us to make plays. He's willing to live with the result of the play.

Q. Were you surprised Chet ended up -- just talk about the difficulty in grabbing it with one hand.

JALEN WILLIAMS: I didn't think he was going to grab it with one hand. I would not have done that. Shout-out to Chet for being 7 feet. I think if you asked him, he'd probably say it was pretty easy. I'm not a 7-footer, so I don't know what to say, but I definitely would not have grabbed that with one hand.

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