

# Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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## Sam Presti

## Acie Law

### Press Conference



SAM PRESTI: Just want to start by, as we always do after the draft, just thanking all of the scouts, the entire group of people that are involved with the draft process, Acie and Vince Rozman just do an unbelievable job of getting us prepared throughout the year.

I also want to just always recognize the fact that so many of the evaluators and the scouts spend so much time away, travel all over the world. There's a lot of rental car returns at 5:00 in the morning; connecting flights to far-off lands show up. The player they're there to see gets in foul trouble in the first three minutes of the game. Like there's just a million stories like that.

But you have to be able to stack all those together in order to put yourself in positions to gather the information that allows us to make decisions.

Acie, Vince and the entire group of people that are focused on amateur evaluation 365 days a year deserve a lot of credit, and I feel so fortunate to work with a group like that.

Just want to -- I can't talk about the trade that we made until it goes through, so I'll do my best to talk around it where I can, but you'll have to just understand that I can't answer things directly.

We're really excited about Nikola. I know you guys are going to ask us a lot of questions about him. We'll be happy to answer them. It was a unique situation to be able to get a player of that caliber where we did, and we're really excited about bringing him into the organization, bringing him into the program.

With that, we'll answer any questions that you guys have.

**Q. What is the situation with Nikola's knee, and is there a timetable?**

SAM PRESTI: Well, obviously we are, like, well-versed on that. The league put in some rules this year where

everybody has access to the new -- to all of the new players that are in the draft. We've seen all of the imaging. Everything that we've seen is -- I don't want to say suitable, but we're comfortable with, I want to say.

Myself and Donnie Strack, our director of medical, who's been here for 17 years now, traveled out to visit Nikola. He examined him in person, was able to spend some time with him.

We had a group of scouts that interviewed him in Treviso. Acie was there for that.

Now we're going to sit down and determine the plan of action for the injury.

But we're going into that extremely optimistic with what it is that we've seen and where I think we'll be able to get to.

But our expectation is that he probably won't be playing for us next season. Our experience with Chet and the time that we used with him during his first year was certainly a factor into the way we thought about this opportunity, and I think we learned some things in that instance. Totally different players, totally different situation, different ages, et cetera, et cetera, but that I think our ability to look at that as an opportunity probably allowed us to -- gave us some confidence to make the decision that we did with him.

**Q. What do you like about his game that's worth the wait?**

SAM PRESTI: I'll let Acie talk about that.

ACIE LAW: We're really excited about Nikola. He's the youngest player in the draft this year, and at that young age, he's demonstrated an ability to play at a high level in a high league, Euroleague competition --

SAM PRESTI: Which you used to dominate, right?

ACIE LAW: I've had some success there. In addition to that, he has great size, great playmaking ability, high IQ, a lot of things to be excited about, so we're looking forward to getting him in.

**Q. Just to backtrack on when you guys first saw him come on the radar, as you watched him evolve, what**

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**you saw that led you to think at 12 that maybe he'd be your guy?**

ACIE LAW: We knew Nikola a long time, even at the junior level. As I mentioned before, his playmaking, his IQ stands out right away, and when you associate that skill set, that package with his size, you see why he can so dominate and have so much success.

I just want to reiterate our excitement for him being there and getting him into the building and incorporating him into what we're doing.

**Q. Is there a time along the way where you felt like he might be evolving to the point where he would be a guy you'd want, a game or a stretch of games in his career overseas?**

ACIE LAW: I don't know if it's one specific time, but from the first time you saw him, you recognized that he's a talented player, and as you continue to evaluate him, you see his improvement year to year, and this year before his injury he was having a great season.

Like I said, we're just excited about getting him here.

SAM PRESTI: The only thing I'd add to that is just if you look at the night as a whole, I'm trying to be careful about what I'm saying, but if you looked at the night as a whole, I think the themes are pretty consistent with other nights that we've had draft-wise. I think tonight was basically -- there's high processing on offense, high skill level with regards to vision and passing, and that's combined with, like, big players, people that can handle the ball, make decisions with the ball, are pretty big for their position, are interchangeable.

I think it's a relatively consistent focus for us, and it's something that we value in players.

With Nikola specifically, having somebody that young with those tools is certainly intriguing, but we have a long way to go with respect to his development. But some of the things that we're able to add to the team tonight in general are consistent with things that we've been trying to focus on for several years now.

**Q. For either of you guys, are there some similarities in his game or kind of the role you envision that Josh Giddey had here, and are those two things connected in any way?**

SAM PRESTI: I wouldn't say -- I wouldn't compare him specifically to Josh or any other player in that way, but like I said earlier, guys that are big for their position, that

process the game well, those guys are play pretty much all over the floor, in different combinations. So we value those skill sets probably more than trying to, like, replicate a specific role or anything like that.

I do think those guys -- I don't think you can have enough people that can make decisions on the court, and when you combine that with size, it definitely increases the effectiveness or the probabilities of those decisions being good.

**Q. If you never made the trade you can't talk about, would you still have made this draft pick?**

SAM PRESTI: You mean --

**Q. Trading Giddey.**

SAM PRESTI: With Topic you mean? Listen, I don't want to get into the hypothetical component of things, but we generally go off what we think are the best players, and in this particular case, I think one of the reasons we probably were in the position to acquire him is because of the injury, and the fact that he wasn't as available to work out.

I feel like we're willing to place a high value on his skill set long-term, but I couldn't answer that specifically, but we generally go off the board.

**Q. Acie, Sam hinted at your familiarity with the league that Nikola was in. Can you maybe describe what that league is like, how it has prepared players for the NBA? Obviously Serbian basketball is just surging right now.**

ACIE LAW: Yeah, Euroleague is the second best basketball league in the world. A lot of NBA players play in that league. A lot of great European players participate in that league. It's a very, very competitive league, and for Nikola to have the success that he's been able to have in that league, in my experience, that's not a normal thing. I think that's something we value a lot.

Euroleague is extremely competitive. I just can't reiterate that enough. In comparison to the NBA, I think it's right up there. I have a lot of respect for him having success there at such a young age.

**Q. You used the word "competitive," and Sam, that was something you said the other night about Alex Caruso was wanting as many of those types of people. What have you seen from Nikola in terms of the competitive mentality that this organization tries to be about?**

ACIE LAW: Man, the Euroleague is men. They don't want a young player to dominate their league and have success. I went over there early this season, and at the game I was at, he was playing against Teodosic, who's arguably one of the better point guards in the history of the Euroleague, and he didn't back down, and that's something that stood out to me, and I'm looking forward to just him getting here and continuing to build on that.

**Q. Sam, you mentioned Chet's rehab. That was a year long. Is your expectation with Nikola to be here, to rehab, to sort of mirror what Chet did in terms of being with the team?**

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, he'll be with us shortly when he gets here. He'll be integrated into the team like any other player. I think we have some things that we've learned from that that should be able to help him get acclimated. He'll be involved in everything that we do.

**Q. You guys had Poku, Micic. Are there any connective threads between some of these Serbian guys?**

SAM PRESTI: I spent a lot of time talking to Vasa about this player, truly. He was a very insightful person relative to this particular player. Vasa had a similar injury early in his career, so I think everybody knows what we think of Micic. He's got a great basketball mind, and so being able to talk to him a little bit about not just a player but what a player at that age is going through and how to -- I think from an empathetic standpoint, I think it's important.

Then also, one of the things about Nikola that I find really beneficial or valuable is I think he's extraordinarily mature for his age. He's an extremely, extremely mature person.

If you speak to his teammates or observe him in team settings, he's a tremendous teammate. I think he's got a great understanding of team dynamics for a young age. I think he's got a great presence of himself and understanding of himself. He's very curious.

The person is really interesting in terms of how he sees teams and basketball and competition and learning, and at that age I think that's pretty rare.

That was also extremely intriguing, to have all of that, and obviously when you have someone that you know as well as Micic, that's very helpful, too.

**Q. Just to follow up on that, Acie, when you met with him in Treviso, what did you sort of learn about him, the person, and what are some of the things as an evaluator that you're looking for?**

ACIE LAW: Exactly what Sam just said. I think that was the one thing that just stood out and just jumped out from his interview is his maturity and his IQ and his understanding of the game of basketball and his willingness and understanding of how to make his teammates better. Student of the game, somebody that loves to play, excited about.

SAM PRESTI: I want to clarify one thing. When I'm talking to Vasa, I spoke specifically to him about having an injury at that age, what is that like; how could you put yourself in that position. Obviously he's Serbian so he knows him.

But I do think that having that insight from him as a foreign player and being injured, the same injury at that point in time, was super valuable for us.

**Q. I know this may not seem like a big deal, but I heard you were without electricity for a chunk of the day. What was that like, and how did that change the day and the dynamics for you?**

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, we were here late last night when those storms came through, and we had to actually exit through the parking lot across the street because the power lines were down across the road.

The power was out in the building except for the draft room had a generator that was operating at that time.

This morning, everything was out, and so we were trying to get the arena up and running if we needed that to do the draft down there. So for most of the day, there really wasn't any power here, and most of all, the AC was not on, so it was extremely hot.

But we have a great group of people, Marc St. Yves and Johnny Schultz were -- I think they may have slept here last night trying to figure out how to get everything up and running, and all the people that were involved in getting things going. We didn't really have anything until I want to say about 5:00 when the AC kicked on, and we're super fortunate that we have people like Saint and Johnny. We just have a whole organization of people like that that are kind of team focused, extremely selfless, and willing to do anything to help the team. So those guys and everyone with them were tremendous in getting us to this position.

If you told me we'd be sitting here with lights on in this room at like 3:00 today, I'd have never believed you. There was no way. But we got it going, were able to get all the scouts in the room. It just would have been too hot to have that many people in one room.

That was probably the biggest thing I was concerned about was you have these guys, these men and women, that spend so much time preparing for this, and because of something like that they may not get the opportunity to be in there. Like that was almost heartbreaking to me.

So the fact that everything came on, we were able to get everybody in there, it's just a big moment for everybody because they put so much work in. To me, that was a big highlight of the night.

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