

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Coach Mark Daigneault

Press Conference



MARK DAIGNEAULT: ... coaching staffs, out on the road. Working with the guys on our games and bodies, and that takes a lot of effort. I want to thank all the staff that did that. I also want to thank Clay and Sam for resourcing that. It allows us to be a 12-month program. Hope you guys had a great summer.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Chet. Obviously he was impactful when he came back from injury, but with a full offseason, shortened offseason for you guys -- but how do you expect kind of him to -- how can a full offseason help him even more than we last saw?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I think what you saw last year. I think he did great work last offseason, and came into last season looking the way he did which was very impressive. Obviously the injury changed the course of last season, and he did an incredible job of hopping on a moving train and helping our team reach its ceiling last year.

And so he's got a track record of productive offseasons. What that actually looks like, I try to stay pretty open to -- I don't really predict anything. The guys that are efficient and impactful are the ones that tend to have the runway for more, and he's clearly shown to be an efficient and impactful player despite only being a third-year player, so we're excited about where that goes.

Q. Were there things in those first 10 games before he got hurt that he was showing that maybe were slow to come back post injury?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: No. I was more referring to those 10 games relative to the previous season. I just think he's shown the ability to use an offseason to improve. He breathes the game. And so he's a guy that, if you give him time, he's going to get to work, and that's what he's done his entire life. It's what he's done this past offseason.

Q. Coach, you guys obviously have a chance, signed your three top stars, you got all the TV appearances. Clearly your positioning in the league as it's seen from the outside has changed. Does that change anything

about how you approach this process from that standpoint as the defending champs you've got an established roster. (Indiscernible) all of that stuff?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: The circumstances are always changing year to year and even within the season. The challenges are always changing year to year and in the season. We try to have a very consistent and stable approach to that. And we try to have things that are pretty timeless and that can transcend circumstances. And we emphasize those in all circumstances. We rely on those in all circumstances and in the face of every challenge.

This year is no different. The unpredictable circumstances and challenges that will come up through the season, that's how we'll navigate them as we always have.

Q. Shai is a guy who gets better every season. We see what he does on court. Can you speak to the behind the scenes work, the offseason practice he goes through -- how much dedication he has to that part?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's a better question for him because a lot of his work is in the invisible spaces. He doesn't -- he just does the work. And a lot of it is unseen. But he is deeply committed to being the best player and leader and person that he can be, and he puts the work in behind that.

Improvement is a skill. And being able to improve kind of ahead of your improvement curve, so to speak, is a skill that he has displayed time and time again. He's got a great process. He's got great vision and he puts the work behind that, clearly.

In terms of what that actually looks like, he's the only person that can really answer that accurately.

Q. Coach, obviously (indiscernible) the offseason started with his wrist. And recently a lot of videos have been coming out working on his left hand. What are those conversations been like recently leading into his ramped-up return?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah. I think the professional basketball player in the offseason wakes up at the same time, does their PT, does their strength training, does their

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basketball work -- once they get into the rhythm of the offseason -- and sometimes does basketball work two times a day, in his case.

And the fact that he was rehabbing an injury didn't change his process in the offseason, which is impressive. It builds an unbelievable amount of fortitude and commitment and mental toughness to do that, even within the constraints.

And he showed that ability. He's a professional basketball player. And even if it's in the face of a rehab, it doesn't change his offseason process. That was very impressive this year with him.

Q. How has your life changed since winning the NBA title?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Not much, to be honest with you. Not much. You're in the cycle of the season, cycle of the offseason. The season ended and we had the draft. After we had summer league, we had to onboard new players. Players got into their offseason stuff.

And the majority -- the only changes my life's taken on is with our kids and our family. We have a young family and they're growing. But that's been the most change that I've experienced.

Q. No, people don't bother you more in town or recognize you or people back home or any of that stuff?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah. That's definitely happened the last couple of years, but that doesn't change your life.

Q. Any thoughts about this group that's uncommon? (Indiscernible). Any concerns that (indiscernible) any concerns that (indiscernible).

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah. Like I said, the circumstances and the challenges are always changing. And a month into the season the circumstances will change and then challenges will change. And that's just the flow of an NBA season and it's pretty predictable as to where that will go.

What is predictable is the solution to it and the things that we'll rely on. We've always relied on being very present. We've always relied on stacking the days. We've always relied on continuous improvement and an emphasis on the things that kind of transcend circumstances. And that's really where our focus has been and is and will continue to be.

Q. You've got a full roster back. You just won the title.

How easy is it to say what will work and (indiscernible) are you constantly looking to change (indiscernible)?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: A lot of the faces are the same. The team is always changing as the league evolves, as players evolve, as we evolve as a program. We audit, every offseason, we audit player development. We audit the offense, the defense, our way of doing things. We're constantly looking for ways to improve.

We're going to make those adjustments coming into the season and continuously look to improve all those things into the season. One thing we have to caution against is assuming that anything from last year carries over. We obviously did a lot of things really well last year, even in our process, and it's important that we get very present, rebuild those habits and reinvest in those fundamentals and not take anything for granted, as we do every year.

Q. We saw guys locked up, (indiscernible). All three guys, (indiscernible) not playing his rookie year. Where would you say you've seen him grow most as like the leader off the court?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean we constantly try to encourage our guys to grow through their experiences. The NBA life is rich with experiences, and some are positive and some are challenging. And he's had his share of both.

But the thing I'll say about Chet as well as many of our guys, but certainly Chet is he's grown through his experiences. He's been in some tough spots, obviously, and faced some challenges young in his career. And he's grown through those.

And then he's also had pretty potent success and shown to be very high impact and he grows through that. And that's skill. It's really a skill. To be able to grow through whatever is going on is how you improve and it's why he's continued to improve and that's why we're so optimistic about his future as well as, like I said, many of the other guys on the team.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: No. I mean he's having a procedure today, and we'll update you guys as appropriate. But we have nothing more to release.

Q. During the Finals you talked a little bit about fans coming up to you having different ideas. What's the worst and best ideas from fans you've heard?



MARK DAIGNEAULT: I can't recall right off the bat. The fans in town, the one thing I'll say is, it's a (indiscernible) question, and that question -- everyone has been so supportive am of the team. I've always said the fan base puts the wind at our backs.

I'm so excited that are our fans are excited as they are about this team. And it gives us a great sense of responsibility as we start another season. We certainly appreciate or fans, can't wait to get back around them in the game setting.

Q. It really felt like (indiscernible) kind of player last season. From a coaching standpoint, what does he bring in a unique way as a defender that you don't see from a lot of guys?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, the first thing I'll say is he's always kind of had that level. I think his first start might have been against Jaylen Brown, guarding Jaylen Brown, which is a tall assignment. So I think he showed that off the bat.

But his versatility is always what stands out. The game is dynamic and the league is dynamic, increasingly so. And so you need dynamic players on both ends of the floor and that's what he is.

He can handle a lot of different assignments. And he really unlocks what we can do out there, both schematically and with lineups because of just how flexible and versatile he is. It's one of the most impactful parts of his game and what he brings to the team.

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