

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Isaiah Hartenstein

Press Conference



Q. You're a young guy yourself. You just seem to invest so much in the young guys that are coming up. I was wondering what you saw from some of the players who because of injury had to step up for the team through the year, Ajay, Cason, Jared once he got here, and how you navigated that?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I think that was one of the things we had to deal with. I mean, it's a gift and a curse at the same time. We had a lot of young guys that had to step up, and I think they did a great job of doing that. I think the organization puts you in situations that you can be ready to step up in these situations.

Again, you never want to deal with the injuries, but I think it helps to have certain players be put in different roles.

I think we just grew as a team, the young guys grew, and I think that was beneficial.

Q. You have a team option this summer. Known for a while, you have some level of uncertainty heading into the summer.

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: Yeah.

Q. How do you deal with your desire to be here in the future?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: Yeah, we just lost yesterday, so at the end of the day, that's something that will be discussed more at the end. Yeah, I love being here. I love the organization, but it's a lot in their hands. I think that them and my agent will talk. It's a business at the end of the day. But whatever happens, I'm truly grateful.

Q. Not only a business decision, but the personal side of things, you've developed some really strong ties with the community as well. How much does all of that factor into your motivation to stay here?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: The community is big for me. I think since I got here, I really started connecting with the

community and just how they approach just giving back, how they approach being selfless, and so on.

It's always a big thing, I think me in general, the whole Oklahoma City have gotten pretty close pretty fast. There's always a personal side to it. But again, it's not really in my court.

Q. I know you'd rather be facing them in The Finals, but what's your perspective going to be seeing a bunch of your teammates in the Knicks trying to win the championship?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: Happy for them. Again, I kind of got there when they were kind of getting back on track or they were kind of redoing everything a little bit, and so I think just what Leon Rose and all those guys did to now be in The Finals is pretty cool. Even for the city, but just being there with those guys who just came in, it's cool to see.

Yeah, I'd rather be playing against them, but just rooting for them right now. There's a lot of guys I know. There's a lot of guys I'm pretty close with. So just happy for them.

Q. You spent a ton of time in (regarding Dort.) What did you learn about him?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I think he did a good job. I think I got him to the stuff I wanted to get him to. There were some games where he was making difficult shots in general. Just looking through the video, I think I did a pretty good job of limiting the stuff I wanted to limit.

In the NBA, with any great player, you're going to have some players where they make the tough shots and you kind of have to live with.

I think in general I kind of proved that I can defend players like that. I think it was always like with the bigger guys, like able to go hard on them. But now just showing I've proved that I can defend guys who do pick and pop, different stuff.

I think it was the Knicks series, when I was with the Knicks, where I struggled a little bit with it, but I worked on it a lot. I think now I've proved that you can put me on different players and do a good job of doing that.

Q. How do you view the season?

... when all is said, we're done.®



ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I mean, yeah, losing is always disappointing. It's definitely hard, especially losing with this group of guys, how close we are. But I think we did a good job of controlling the controllables. There's a lot of adversity throughout the season.

Yeah, we want to come out winning at the end of the day, but I think we just did a good job of controlling our circumstances.

Yeah, but it was definitely you always want to win the last game of the season. Yeah, I think we could have been a little better, but yeah.

Q. Do you think with all the injuries you guys had to still play this far?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: Yeah, when you look at it, we lost two of our main ball handlers in the series, but you never want to make excuses. Even throughout the series, we never looked at it as they're not here, it was more this is the guys we have.

So I think -- I still think we had enough to win that series, but I think just having the guys step up was huge for us.

We've been doing it all season. You always want to be healthy, but sometimes you can't control that.

Q. Isaiah, I know there's all these variables involved in winning the title, but repeating is a different thing entirely. Was there a time in the playoffs, in the series, where you felt just how difficult it was to repeat?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: To be honest, I never felt like we didn't have a chance throughout the series. No matter who was on the court, I felt like we still had enough to do it. There was a couple times where we just didn't execute the way we should have.

Again, no matter who is on the court, I think we always have a chance. I don't think anyone on our team ever thought that we didn't have a chance. We went to Game 7. We saw a chance in that game to win that game multiple times but just didn't get the job done.

Q. Not every team has that no excuses attitude. It seems like it's bred in the team, Shai was talking about it just now. Where does it come from?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I mean, making excuses isn't going to change anything. I think what makes the organization and team pretty special is we all have kind of the same mindset. It's kind of just controlling what you can

control. We had a long night.

Just controlling what we can control and not making excuses for anything. I think that's how a lot of us even got here. If you look at all of our roster, I mean, Lu, AC, I got waived, Shai got traded. You have all these guys where normally it's kind of an underdog story that people appreciate, but it's a little different now, I guess.

I think that's why we go into it knowing there's going to be ups and downs, there's going to be stuff out of our control. We do our best to control our emotions.

Q. You talk about it's a little different now. What do you mean when you say it's a little different now?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I mean, it's -- next question (laughter).

Q. You've done a lot of work on the -- first things first, what did you get from working in the community? And what's one misconception you had coming into Oklahoma that you've learned through your work?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I think I learn a lot every time I do these community events. I think just sitting down with the kids, learning what they've been through, I think just helps me learn more about myself, learn how to be a better human being.

I think we're in a situation where I get a lot of recognition just for playing basketball, and I think just to be able to go back in the community, kind of I guess humble yourself again.

It doesn't matter for me if you're the best basketball player in the world working a normal 9:00 to 5:00 job, we're all humans at the end of the day. It doesn't make me better just because I can play basketball a little better than someone else.

I think some people are just unfortunate with certain circumstances, and that's why I just want to make sure, even if it's just listen to kids, that that can help them have more belief in themselves that they can achieve something. That's always something that's really important to me.

Again, I was fortunate enough to have certain people in my life that really helped me believe I can get here, and I think sometimes that's all kids need, is that someone comes in and believes in them and helps them achieve whatever they want.

That's always just really important to me, just to be in that little aspect.

Q. Statistically Chet had a down series. What do you think went on the last couple games?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: Again, something with Chet is he's always going to have come in, work hard. He's probably going to be his hardest critic of anyone. Again, he's so important to the team. When he's playing his best. One thing about Chet he can sit down and watch film.

I think that's one thing you don't ever have to worry about Chet that he's not going to go in the film room and get better. Again, when Chet's at his best, we're at our best.

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