

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Jalen Williams

Press Conference



Q. You're a guy who's kind of a fighting within, has always burned very strongly. How much do you think it's going to be burning this summer to get yourself ready for this upcoming year?

JALEN WILLIAMS: A lot. I'm going to do what I usually do in the summer, so it's not that. It's just more like the year I had kind of sucked. I'm going to sit with that for a little bit and get back at it.

But the summer doesn't change that. The MOTIVATION is always there. That doesn't go away.

Q. Mark was pretty clear about the fact that you didn't return to your former play before you came back for Game 6. Did you feel like you were ready when you came back?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Did I feel what?

Q. Did you feel like you were ready when you came back, or did you feel like you were unready, I guess?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Hmm. Feel ready? I mean, it's Game 6 -- is that the game you're referring to? It's Game 6, a chance to close it out. I've been hurt. We went through all the right protocol to try and give it a go to play and just let it go where it was.

But we only have a day in between each game, so I don't really have the luxury of time to, like, have these on-court workouts to really test and go things and do things. Everybody in the world knows I wasn't myself. I played nine minutes. I don't even think I shot the ball. I just couldn't move.

But I would rather have went out there and tested it out than -- test it out and realize I couldn't play, so that was just something that was a very calculated risk and we took a lot of time into it, but we just didn't have enough time to really -- you know what I mean, go through a whole 'nother week of ramp up and stuff.

Q. I think it was March or April when you came back in Philly. You said the regular season had taught you patience. Obviously the injury was aggregated a couple more times since then. What has this period since then taught you now?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Be patient. That's all I can do. You can work so hard to do something, and if it's not aligned with what God has going on, you've just got to wait.

That's what it was. It's frustrating, but it's one of those things, like what else can I do? I look back at all the rehab I did, and I'm coming in here at 9:00 at night to do extra stuff and waking up earlier than the team to get here. I'm here all day. It's tough.

And I think what makes it a lot harder is I'm not coming back and I'm playing -- I'm not going to say like a team as like a disrespectful thing, but it's not like we're playing a regular season game where I can go in there and play 10 minutes.

I get hurt, and then I'm playing Game 1 in the Western Conference Finals and I have to play a double overtime. A lot of that stress and stuff, you're playing the best basketball on the planet. I don't have like a ramp-up or a lot of practices to really give it a go, and I'm going out there to try to play as hard as I can.

It's one of those things that comes with wrist and hamstring injuries are tricky like that.

Q. Is it the expectation? You mentioned having a similar off-season, but what's the rest look like? Is that kind of the best way to get over these hamstring injuries that keep popping up? What's the plan for dealing with those?

JALEN WILLIAMS: You know, it's a good question. I don't know how I'd figure it out. I've messed it up every time so far if I'm being honest. I think rest, like everything, will really help a little bit. We'll just go from there.

Like I said, I have not been awarded the luxury -- if you look back at a lot of it, I have to come back in important periods of the season. We're coming back, we're trying to hold the 1 spot, and then you're playing the Playoffs, which is a totally different thing, and then come back for Game 6



and Game 1.

I think just having like a nice cool-down period where I don't have to try and rush or accelerate anything is going to be nice to just let my body completely settle, get back to zero.

Q. Do you think it has a snowball effect from the wrist -- obviously you didn't get the season you normally did. Do you think it kind of led to each other?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I don't want to blame it on that, but that could very well be one of the things. It's not something we haven't looked at. I don't want to sound sarcastic, but I'm not a doctor, I can't give you a very pinpoint answer on it, but it could have done one of those things.

And I had a wrist surgery in the middle of the season, too, so I have a lot of downtime and again, just wasn't afforded the luxury of time to really have a whole summer or have even some of the season to really deal with it and get my whole entire body right.

It is what it is, but now I do.

Q. How do you feel like you dealt with the frustrations throughout the season, not starting, coming back, wrist injury, all of that, and how tough was it to deal with those frustrations while trying to come back in those important moments?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah. I mean, I think this year has really shown me that basketball is not like -- I don't know how to say this. I think in my head before the year and every year since I've been playing, basketball has been my identity. So when that's not at the forefront and I can't do it, it was kind of eye opening a little.

So that was a reality check, I would say. So I think that was the most difficult part because this is what I do. Everything I do revolves around me playing basketball and getting extra shots. I love competing and playing. You guys can see when I'm on the bench I'm excited to just be there. Being in the NBA is still crazy to me. It's crazy that I'm going to be going into year five.

So that was a little eye opening, and it was extremely frustrating throughout the year to not be able to play. The summer was just as frustrating because it's like, I won, I was excited to get back on the court. Obviously I couldn't.

It was a lot. I think I dealt with it pretty good. I think the people around me and just the organization, I think if I was somewhere else it might be very different on how I approached it. But we have a really good team. I have

really good people around me.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

JALEN WILLIAMS: I realized I was a lot mentally tougher than I was, and I already thought I was pretty tough. It's just kind of unlocked a new version of my patience. I think even just understanding it's like everybody in the treatment room is trying to get me back and I'm also trying to get back, so it definitely gave me a lot more grace.

And like I said, it was a lot more eye opening for me to understand you can want something really bad and not get it. So what's the next option for that.

That's how I attacked it. But yeah, it was mentally exhausting. Like I said, you've got to be -- being injured is worse than -- I don't want to say playing because that sounds obvious, but the stuff you have to do being injured is -- you have to work double what you do in a game in order to get to somewhere where you can play in an actual game.

So it's a lot that goes into it, and having to do that all year instead of playing sucks.

Q. I'm sure there was actually motivation to play alongside the group. What is it about this group that makes you want to lay it all out on the line?

JALEN WILLIAMS: They play just as hard as I do and they want it just as bad as me, so when you have that mutual understanding it makes you respect the team.

And they're also my friends. I feel like everybody in the room has friends that you would do a lot for, and it's no different for the team. It's tough, and that group is -- basically I won a championship with everybody in that group, so there's another tie to it, as well.

We've been through a lot. Not being out there really sucked.

Q. You mentioned all the hours that you put in, staying late, getting here early, and to a man, everybody on the team has talked about just the crazy way you've attacked this rehab. I don't think anyone would have rationally blamed you for not wanting to come back and taking your time. What does it mean when you hear that support from the guys on the team?

JALEN WILLIAMS: It doesn't shock me at all. But it does mean a lot. Whenever somebody sees you working really hard and acknowledging it, it does give you that extra

boost to go out there and want to keep doing it and stick with it. They had to do that a lot. I don't know how many games I played this year. I can't imagine it was over 40.

Just having them there through that was time -- I don't know if as many teams could be as injured as we were and do what we just did. That's a huge testament to the team and just what they had to do. The amount of injuries we had throughout the year, just pivotal moments for us to step up and be No. 1 in the west for a third year and obviously get to the Western Conference Finals and go to seven with the Spurs with people down and having to play and do things they don't normally have to do and not what they signed up for, for us to do that I think is a big accomplishment. We'll be better for it, I'm sure.

Q. Being a basketball player your entire life, you've got been a public figure entire life. How have you balanced your love of basketball, being a basketball player and being a public figure outside of just basketball?

JALEN WILLIAMS: The biggest thing for me is I just try and do whatever I be doing before I was a public figure. Hearing you say that kind of -- I don't even think of myself as a public figure. I just happen to be very good at basketball. That's how I approach it.

I feel like I do the exact same things that I did when I was 18 or 16. I go to the movies. I go to the mall. I do whatever. I'll go out to eat. I do normal human stuff. That's how I attack it, I guess. But I don't make any conscious efforts. I think I just try and watch what I say in the media for the most part. I try and bite my tongue because I know kids watch our media and do that, so I always try and take the high road on a lot of things.

Q. How important is it to do the little things, be the same kid that you were at 15, 16, when it comes to your mental well-being, especially this season?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, this year was big. I got into movies a lot just because it helps me not think about basketball. I'm trying to think what else. Yeah, to answer your question, it's just like doing regular things makes me feel normal and doesn't make me feel like the weight of not playing was on my back. Because when you're not doing those things, it's like usually playing basketball and stuff, so trying to fill the void with that time. I thought I did a pretty good job of it.

But yeah, it's also tough, like you have a lot of thoughts going through your head when you're not playing. Everybody has something to say about some things. That makes it difficult.

But yeah, I just try and find the stuff I like to do and pass the time with it.

Q. Is the hamstring back healthy, is it just staying off of it, rest?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I don't know how my summer is going to play out. I won't have had this long of a summer in a good little minute. It's just going to be like a rest thing. Like I've been saying, I just haven't had time to really play, and to dive deeper into my hamstring, some of it was my body felt so good because I hadn't been running around. I hadn't been playing. I was lighter. I just don't think my body could keep up with how I was moving.

So it's just going to be more of like a strengthening some of the stuff that I found out. Like when you're rehabbing over the course of some months, your body kind of changes, and I was just moving a lot more free.

Like I'm looking at some of the stuff I was doing like in the Suns series, Game 1 of the Spurs. The way I was moving looks completely different than how I've ever moved at the weight I'm at. I'm moving how I moved my rookie year with probably like 25 extra pounds on. That part was like a silver lining.

I think now it's just getting my body stronger to move how I would like to move now that I have this new range in my hips and my feet feel good. We've found rhythm there, it's just about getting rest and strengthening that and being good for next year.

Q. Obviously with you and Ajay out, a lot will be made about hypotheticals and whatnot, but obviously you guys will probably be back, but it feels like the Spurs are here to stay, too. When did you feel like --

JALEN WILLIAMS: I know, that's beautiful. Basketball.

Q. When did you sort of feel like they could be a real threat to you guys --

JALEN WILLIAMS: Last year.

Q. When did you feel like they became a real threat and how did you see them evolve and where are you at now as far as a long-term rival or whatever you want to call it?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Well, I mean, kicked our ass a couple times this year at the beginning of the year, so they were a threat then. I mean, you could just tell -- it's honestly crazy playing them because it feels like we're playing a version of

ourselves. So it's like -- even yesterday watching them, it's like, the runs that they make, we make those runs, so it's weird to be on the other end of that. But it's also exciting.

We don't run from competition. It kills me I couldn't play there because those series make you better. Whether or not you play good or bad, going out there and competing teams that play like that always make each other better.

It sucks that I couldn't play in that series. But they're so young, and they all accept the role that they're in, and that's why they're really good. It was a fun series to watch, I guess.

But yeah, they're going to be good for a long time. We're going to be good for a long time. It means people will watch the games, which means the money will go up. Life will be pretty good for a while.

Q. To that point, you're going to kind of view this as chapter 1. There was a lot of tension in the series. I don't know how much you being there -- how big of a difference do you feel like you could have made if you had felt like yourself?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I don't do the hypothetical thing too much because it does not solve anything that's going on right now. But to humor your question, obviously I think I could have made an impact. I think we could have won if I played. Went to 7 with them without me playing. I don't think I make us worse. That's really my answer to that. It's also hats off to them. What do you want them to do about me being hurt? They still have to go out there and try and beat us. That's what it is and they did that.

All we can do is tip your hat, wish them the best of luck going on, even though I don't want to, and go from there. But they're a good team. It would have been a challenge if I played or not, but I definitely think I could have changed the series. But we'll just have to wait until we meet again at some point.

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