

# Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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## Sam Presti

### Press Conference

SAM PRESTI: Just a couple things before we get started. I want to recognize the loss of Stacey King from yesterday. Obviously a great Oklahoman from Lawton and a great player at OU. We send our thoughts and prayers to everybody associated with him. It's obviously a great loss to the basketball NBA community.

Obviously I want to start by thanking all of our fans, all of our partners, everybody that is associated in some way, shape, or form in supporting the team and the organization across the world. Very grateful to everybody.

Always want to take time at this juncture to thank the media for telling the story of our team, our players, our community. Everybody in the media has really helped amplify all the good things about Oklahoma City to many, many people that live far away from here. So we're very grateful for that.

I'd like to start, as I always do, with an opening statement that is directed to our fans, directly to them. That's who I'll be speaking to. And then once I'm able to get through that, happy to take any questions that people have.

When I sat in front of everybody last September, I made the central theme of the discussion NBA history, and if you recall at that time, there was a lot of external conversation about why it was so hard to repeat in the modern NBA. Of course, there was a tremendous amount of excitement from the previous season and what it could mean for the season in front of us as a team.

We talked about how fortunate Oklahoma City was to be associated with the NBA, to have a team, and all the community good that comes with that. We also talked a good deal about the amount of good fortune it took for us to win at the highest level and that the role of randomness can't be overlooked when things do break your way.

Of course, we also talked about turning the page, having the discipline and humility to separate ourselves from success of the previous season to give the next team the best opportunity to find ultimate success again. Oddly, I



think all those things are still extremely relevant, maybe just as much as they were then.

The history of the NBA is littered with teams that were not able to find ultimate success again. I think there have only been three teams that have repeated since we've been in Oklahoma City, and the reasons for that are many, probably too many to list. But the fact is that it helps illustrate how rare and how special it is when you do have a chance to win at the highest level in this league or in professional sports in general.

However, NBA history is also built on the backs of those teams that saw their losses as a continued quest for improvement and progress. Most importantly, they saw it as what competition boils down to, what it's all about at any level of sports.

So NBA history tells us everything we need to know once again. The greatest teams and the greatest players in the game are only thought of that way because they encountered challenges often outside of their control in the form of a great team, a tremendous individual player, an ill-timed injury. It could be anything that pops up. That's what makes the NBA great.

And just as we talked about the need for discipline and humility to separate the page from last season's success, in order to find success in the present, we have to be able to humbly turn the page again. This time, however, we have to have the discipline and humility to separate ourselves from the circumstances of last season.

The reasons why this is vital is twofold. First, it's the rite of passage for all great teams and players in NBA history to encounter and overcome the inevitable realities of competing at the highest level. I know that our team and our organization, we want to be considered a great team, not for what's achieved, but for how it's achieved, and also for the manner in which our players apply themselves day to day in the face of a changing game, a changing league, and a changing society.

Second, regardless of how the outside world or even some of us inside the organization might view the end of last season, we can't let that dim or distract us from the outlook that we have in front of us with this team. Great professional sports teams have stamina, but great



professional sports organizations have endurance and must have endurance to support their teams. There are many more levels I think this terrific team can access. It's a tremendous collection of individuals. But in order to do so, we're going to have to have the humility to turn the page again.

All that to say, I'm extremely, extremely proud of what this team has accomplished, not just this year, but in the previous years as well. We're 189-57 in the last three years in the regular season. That's a 77 percent winning percentage. We're 33-15 in the postseason. That's a 69 percent winning percentage.

All those numbers are great, but what I'm most proud of is the approach of our players -- their maturity, their wisdom, their standard for professionalism that they demonstrate under any and all circumstances.

This was never more clear to me than in our exit meetings that I had with them last week. The level of reflection, accountability, professionalism, all of this less than 24 hours after being eliminated from the Western Conference Finals in a Game 7. At no time did anyone discredit their opponent, discredit their opponent's success or talent, make excuses about officiating or the rules or take a glass-half-empty outlook.

Of course, they were disappointed, they were hurt, they were realistic, but they were also accountable, offering suggestions, offering to make adjustments if it would help the team, and it was just a tremendous showing of how far this team has come with such a young group.

Now, I was expecting, look, they had every reason to come in and blame injuries, right, because that was a big story of our season. Our playoff starters from last season played 11 games together. Chet, Shai, and Dub played 27 games together. Obviously we know the playoff injury issues; those are fresh so we don't need to talk about those, but not one guy raised that as an issue that they wanted to reflect on.

Instead, they tipped their cap to their opponent, showed tremendous respect for the challenge of the Western Conference, and demonstrated a significant amount of confidence in their abilities, in their teammates, and our ability to continue to improve.

I think we're extremely well positioned as an organization. We have 15 players under contract that we really, really like. We pick 12th, 17th, and 37th in a historically deep draft. A team with our record, as you know, would be picking 30th in this draft. We've had -- in three consecutive years now, we've had a different All-NBA player, an

All-Star, made tremendous progress there. Those are groundbreaking things for the organization, and on paper we're the fifth youngest team in the NBA.

The teams that have an average age younger than us averaged 28 wins this past season. So a lot to look forward to.

As far as this off-season and what's in front of me, I'd say it begins with a lot of listening. I have to spend time talking to our players. I have to spend time talking to them and understanding where they are, what their priorities are, where their head is at.

I'm looking forward to spending time talking to our coaching staff and our front office staff about their thoughts and ideas moving forward. And as I do at this time every year, I have to sit down with ownership and try to get a sense for their priorities and objectives and their outlook moving forward as well.

After I spend time having these conversations and doing my best to understand where everybody is, I'll have to synthesize all that information and develop some potential pathways that I'm hopeful can meet everybody's goals.

Let me just say this for the record. Wherever we end up relative to the financial investment in the roster, it's as much about giving back to the fans as it is about paying for a basketball team. Our fans mean everything to us. We begin and end with them. We've experienced 18 years of Blue. Whatever we can do to keep continuing to create experiences, moments of joy to lift up the community, to give people a place to congregate and watch some great competition, that's what we're going to do. It's always about them.

As I've said before, we've had ample time to prepare for this scenario. When we repositioned, replenished, and rebuilt the team, we were well aware of what it would take if we were ever fortunate enough to fall into a perennial contender in Oklahoma City again.

So this listening process I'm referring to, it's going to take some time. I'm sure you're going to hear plenty of misinformation from the media -- no offense. A lot of that's just a distraction. It could be coming from our opponents who would like to see a particular outcome of things. It could be coming from various agents, not even the agents of our own players.

But when we work through all of this, and it's probably going to take some time, you'll know. We don't have a specific path in mind because I have to spend time working with everybody, getting a sense of what everyone's outlook

is, and then we'll have a sense of what the possibilities are.

I do think this team has a lot more layers, a lot more layers it can access. It has intangibles and trust. It has brainpower and brass. And as constituted, is a tremendous ambassador for our community and state.

In this job as a leader, what you want to do is build teams that you wish you could have been a part of, and I feel that way about this era of the Thunder.

In closing, we talk about our seasons and chapters here, primarily because we're such a young organization, and in order to best understand your story, you need to see it kind of horizontally, not vertically. So that's how we look at it, we look at it in chapters.

Chapter 18 has come to an end. It was an incredible display of resilience, relationships, professionalism, and competitive excellence in the face of adversity and expectation. As we know, there's no silver platters in Oklahoma City. We don't expect to be given anything, and we don't expect to unfold favorably as some teams in some cities are accustomed to.

Every year our goal is to repeat a process, not chase an outcome. This process is to position our team and our organization so that if we're fortunate enough to have things break our way, we can achieve ultimate success. This is how every NBA champion is able to achieve success.

The path ahead of us in our journey to be a great team, a team that's going to be remembered, is well worn by the people that came before us in the league. What makes these teams lasting and what makes them great isn't that they defeated their opponents, it's that they also defeated the circumstances that stood in their way during their journey.

We have a chance to be a team that makes our mark over time, but we will not make our singular mark every single time. That's just not how this works. NBA history tells us there are no final victories, but what I can tell you about the people in this building is we're ready to get back to work and we're ready to begin again.

With that, I'll take any questions.

**Q. You kind of laid out some of those numbers about how infrequently the starting group and Shai, Chet, Dub played together, in addition to that, having the third-most injuries all year. What do you feel the cumulative effect of all of that was on the season as it built out?**

SAM PRESTI: I think in the past we've had -- we've always had -- injuries are part of the sport. I think in every time we've had something like that happen, we've seen some silver lining in that, like individual development, people stepping in, changing, trying new things. I think that -- and I think that happened again this year, to a large extent. We've had a lot of big growth in individuals.

I do think the one thing, if there's one thing I'm a little frustrated about, besides not winning the final quarter of the season, is I think we lost out on a lot of team development. Just the amount of -- when we play 31 different starting lineups, the lack of continuity with our main guys. There's some team things coming out of -- we learn from every series that we're in.

Coming out of the Indiana series, I think there's some things we felt really good about trying to improve upon and get better at, but you need the regular season to do that. And at some level, we could never get to those things because it felt like we get one guy back, we lose two guys. We get two guys back, we...

So, you know, the rotation, the nine or ten guys that were playing in the playoffs last year, I think they played together -- we had them available for seven or eight games this year. So at some point it kind of tips a little bit. It's not an excuse because we still could have gone to the Finals, obviously, we pushed ourselves to get to that point, and I'm really proud of that.

But in terms of what we lost out on, I think the team-development component of things that we had a pretty good handle on what we wanted to attack, it's just hard to do that without some of the key cogs out there on a regular basis.

**Q. In terms of individual development, Chet, All-NBA season, All-Defensive season, obviously didn't finish to his standards in the Spurs series, but how do you overall evaluate his year considering the way it ended? How do you factor all that in?**

SAM PRESTI: Chet's one of our guys, you know. He's been so impactful. He drives winning on so many different levels for us. You pointed out some of the things he accomplished: He's a first-time All-Star, second Defensive Player of the Year, Third Team All-NBA.

We were sweeping our way to the Western Conference Finals primarily because of his efforts in the series. All that to say he didn't have a great series in the last series. But as I was saying in the open, like if you go back and look at some of the greatest players in the game, they all have



these moments where they run into defeat or struggle. That's what makes them great players is that they're able to continue to move on from that and improve.

Two things about Chet I'd also add: One, he's an underdog. I mean, like we've seen that everywhere. He's been questioned all the time. I watched that guy when he was in high school, people had all kinds of questions and doubts. I mean, that's nothing new to this guy. He's used to being an underdog. That's why he fits here so well, you know.

The other thing about him is he doesn't need -- this is a guy that is intrinsically motivated. He doesn't need people questioning him or things on the Internet to drive his improvement. The best example of that is we won The Finals last year, won the championship, he was dominant in Game 7 defensively and through a lot of the playoffs.

Then look at how much better he got over the summer. Came into the start of the season with no Jalen, and he was significantly improved, and that's coming off a Finals win. So he doesn't need somebody to nudge him, he doesn't need somebody to question him, it's just kind of how he's wired. So I'm not really that concerned about him.

And this is part of the path we're on, like I said before. The good thing is you get to confront those things again and continue to improve, and I'm confident that he'll be ready to go.

**Q. In September you were asked about like the looming costs of this roster. You said the rules themselves are not prohibitive to our ability to maintain the team. You said the challenge is the financial side of it. What are some of those initial talks with ownership about kind of their commitment to keeping this team together?**

SAM PRESTI: Like I said, there's several different constituents I've got to talk to, right? You've got to talk to our players. We have to talk internally with our staff. Then obviously, like I said, at this time every year at this juncture, I'm going to sit down with them and get an understanding of kind of how they're seeing things and where we're headed in that direction.

Relative to the system question you asked, yeah, we're still early days in the new system. I don't think there have been a lot of teams our age that have been in this kind of apron territory. I thought about it a lot. I think one of the things about once you enter into the second apron, or something along those -- or the first apron or go deeper, you've really got to believe in your coach because the opportunities to

really just flip players in and out once you -- the solutions are going to be harder to come by once you're up there, and that's the whole point of the system, right, is to make it very hard to transact things.

I think everybody knows how I feel about Mark. The reason why I think you have to believe in the coach if you're going to go into that area is you are restricted in what you can do in terms of just jumping on the trade machine because that's how we make all of our trades, we just get on the trade machine.

(Laughter.)

But adaptability, creativity, willingness to try new things, looking at roster -- lineup construction. We want to create as many options that can compound off one another so that we have options if we run into different situations.

And he loves this team, you know. He loves this team. That's one of the realities, but there just haven't been a lot of experiences with teams in this realm, if we end up there. That's still important.

**Q. You said "everyone knows how I feel about Mark." Would you expound on that, especially at the end of the season here. You just got through saying you are putting a lot of trust in this guy in this next step in the Thunder.**

SAM PRESTI: He's been tremendous. I think he's done such an excellent job. Not just to totally fall victim of the moment here, but when you're in the playoff series and you're losing players within the series, with no practice time, and you have to create -- recreate an entire like offensive approach, or even defensively losing Dub is such a huge factor to the defense -- and there's no practice. You're doing this stuff in a ballroom in a hotel, like let's try this tonight.

So I think that, to get us as far as we were -- we had a lead at halftime. We were right there in the fourth quarter. We just fell a little bit short. I thought it was an immaculate job for him and the players. Our players are very, very -- the wisdom of the players, I talked about early on in our early days of our process about just like the rate of learning that the players experienced, how quickly they were learning and being able to apply things, and I think we saw that throughout the postseason.

History of the league is I don't think there's anyone that's missed core players and were able to get through. You can miss guys for a series here, a couple games or something like that. For us in I think it was 2013 when we lost Russell, we couldn't make it out of the second round

without him.

But you can -- there's plenty of NBA history that tells you a couple games, but hard to make it there. That's why we talked about last year, when we were fortunate enough to win, the role of good fortune. When it happens to you, you have to recognize that because oftentimes it's a battle of attrition and it comes down to margins.

I think Mark's done an unbelievable job throughout his time with us.

**Q. How does winning influence the decisions like in terms of team building over the summer?**

SAM PRESTI: You mean having won last year?

**Q. Yes.**

SAM PRESTI: Well, I would hope it would make us even more hungry to compete. I think with us, as I said, I think there's a lot more layers to the team because the team is still so young, and many of our best players have yet to enter their prime. So we've always talked about getting to the point where the primes of our core players are overlapping, and we have not really approached that.

Quite frankly, if you look at the three guys I mentioned earlier -- Chet, Shai, and Dub -- over four years they played 40 percent of the games together. They've missed more than half our games as constituted. Chet had a big injury and pushed himself to come back to play in the playoffs. Obviously Dub missed a big portion of this year, and Chet missed his rookie year.

So getting that kind of continuity, I know to be where we are, it's great. It's not an excuse. We'd take these outcomes 100 times out of 100, but I think there's more there for us as we continue to learn and grow from all these experiences and travel these paths that other NBA teams have had to travel.

Then I think the other thing is we don't take this period of time for granted. This is a very, very special period of time in Oklahoma City and I think a very pivotal time for the future of the organization in that the way you begin your first 20, 25 years, the level of success that you can establish what can be possible in this city relative to professional basketball, I think really does set up a level of stability and a brand for the franchise for many years down the line when none of us are sitting in this room.

That's not lost on any of us. That's not lost on any of us. That's why we talk all the time about creating a legacy in real time. You've heard me say that before in these press

conferences. Because we really do feel like your first 20, 25 years, you don't get to do that over, and if you look at some of the most successful franchises in the NBA, be it after the merger in '76 or what have you, they go through ups and downs, they go through trials and tribulations as a franchise, but their starting point is very, very sound because it demonstrates what's possible, and I think we also feel that way.

So we're not taking for granted the opportunity we have in front of us. It's not like we can just get it back. I said in the open, sure, there are some teams, some cities that are accustomed to having a team like this roll around every ten years. We're not thinking that way. We're thinking about how do we continue to put up and stack great seasons.

Does that mean we're going to be the last team standing every year? We all know it's professional sports, it doesn't work like that, but I think we can be in the conversation and continue to improve with the group that we have, but we're going to have to get better and we're going to have to continue to be resourceful, and we're going to have to continue to be competitive.

I think that's the other thing, to your question, when I hear that, once you have achieved or demonstrated you're capable, like to me the competitor in you is to continue to improve and to chase more improvement, not to be complacent in any way.

**Q. I've got about three questions in one, but they're all related to the guys with team options. Obviously Hart, Dort, and Kenrich. Just your approach with those three and then a couple side questions.**

SAM PRESTI: Can we just do one at a time?

**Q. Yes.**

SAM PRESTI: I'm sorry, I haven't slept very much in the last week, and we'll get to all of them, I promise.

On the team option stuff, first thing, like I said, I've got to talk to everybody. I've got to get a sense of kind of where everybody is. There's a human component, an emotional component to all of these things that I think sometimes people don't understand or don't -- because they don't have to, you know what I'm saying? With all the constituents I'm talking to, you know what I'm saying? I've got to be able to take it in and understand it and see how I can position it for everybody, if possible.

But until I have those conversations, I won't know like how things are lining up, how -- is there alignment? How are things unfolding, are they lining up for us? Is it possible



that we just pick up the options for everybody and roll into next season when we really have a bigger financial jump for the team? That's certainly possible. That could potentially be one of the pathways that we take. I certainly wouldn't rule that out because we haven't gotten through those conversations.

I do feel comfortable saying like the process itself to get to what these potential options might be, it could take a little while. I could see it going a little deeper into the summer than we're used to because I want to try to understand everything that's available to me in terms of how to put things together, and I wouldn't put like a specific timeline on it because I've got to spend time really trying to sort it all out.

We could even be in a situation, because we have the draft coming up, where we might have more players -- like if we feel it's more beneficial for the organization to have the draft rights to certain players, like we might draft those players irrespective if they're going to be on the team or what have you. So it could take some time. It might not look clean into a box, but if that's what it's going to take, that's what it's going to take. It just depends what I hear.

**Q. Question two, specific to Isaiah. Obviously his role on this team has been huge. It was even maybe bigger and more significant against the Spurs. Just the level, how imperative do you think it is to have his skill set, his persona, whatever, as part of this team?**

SAM PRESTI: Hart has been great. He's been a big factor in a lot of our success. Also, I know whenever I talk about him, I never want to not mention just the amount of community work this guy has done here in such a short amount of time. Just unbelievable. Him and his family, they have put two feet into this community and given it a huge hug. He's been wonderful off the floor as well.

What his contributions are, I think that speaks for itself. I do think one of the things -- I hate to keep coming back to this, but it's more about an evaluation opportunity than it is about the results because I'll take the results we've had nine times out of ten, but he's missed like 40 percent of the time with us. He's one of the guys I was referring to in Nick's question, which is like a lot of the things we want to try to get to continuity-wise, he's a big part of the team. So sometimes we weren't able to get to certain things because he wasn't out there, he was dealing with certain things throughout the season.

A lot with Ajay, same thing. Ajay only played in like 60 percent of his games with us since we've had him. Those are real important players for us and the way we want to do things, but I think Hart's been wonderful. He's such a great

team guy, and we're lucky to have him. We're really lucky to have him.

**Q. Lastly, I wanted to ask about Lu. He's obviously got a history with this franchise that runs as deep as anybody on the roster. Just wondering how his history may impact his future?**

SAM PRESTI: Again, I have to sit down with him, talk to him, get an understanding of things from his point of view. Again, you're talking about some guys that are tremendous contributors to everything.

When I talk to Lu, you know, Lu always talks about like "we," you know what I mean? I love that. He's been all in since the day that he walked in here undrafted, you know what I'm saying? And just worked himself through like a lot of our other guys.

I mentioned Chet as an underdog. Most of the guys are underdogs. Most of the guys were not anointed at a young age, didn't have a lot of help up, weren't given a whole lot of boost. Everything they've done has been earned, Lu chief among them.

Both those guys, they're great. I think all of us would love to bring everybody back. I think that's -- if it were up to us, I'd take my chances with this team healthy and see where we could go, if we could continue to develop some of the continuity things that we talked about. I think there will be some jumps in the team individually, but to me it's the collective stuff where I feel we can really make use of the time together that will really help us.

We already have a lot of continuity just from being together even though it's been very choppy just because of injuries during the tenure of the guys. But I would never take any of those guys for granted. Just awesome.

**Q. Historically deep draft, is that your official assessment? And how much flexibility does those two first-round picks offer?**

SAM PRESTI: Well, the truth of the matter is we won't know how deep it is for like four years, you know what I mean? That's just how this works. Everybody's guessing. Everybody's trying to shift the odds in their favor when they're evaluating the draft.

But certainly, I think, on paper and the way that people feel about this particular draft, I think people are pretty excited about it.

The next part was about the flexibility of the picks? Yeah, everybody knows we try to move up every year. We try to

get a price for what it would take for us to move out entirely, and then we also have contingencies to move back in the draft if we think that would -- it's all about creating value. That's how we see each one of these picks. That's what I mentioned before, sometimes the best value is to take the best player on the board and figure it out later.

What you don't want to do is plan yourself into a pretzel and say, well, because this isn't figured out yet, we're not going to take this opportunity in front of us even though this might be where the best value is, and you let an option go away. Especially where we're picking, those players are extremely valuable. They're in the top 20 of a really good draft. So we're not going to let that opportunity pass us by because we haven't sorted through everything else yet.

But we'll look at all these different options. I think one thing that happens during the draft is people kind of look away from the probabilities, you know, where the picks are. There's -- I don't know what the bias would be, but there's all these different biases and psychological biases. You can offer somebody something that maybe is an actualization of what they already have -- an actualization of what they're hoping to have with the pick, but they won't do it because all of us want the opportunity to pick the player even though you know the odds at where you're picking are so slim.

Once you get into the 20s, the chances of getting an elite player is like 3 percent, or maybe even less than that, because I think when people always say, oh, just pick Bam at 15, pick Giannis at 13, I think it's a 3 percent chance, you know what I mean? If you walk in to your boss and say I've got a great plan, it's going to fail 90 percent of the time.

But we sometimes, especially when we're going through lottery reform, everyone says, oh, it doesn't matter. People will just find Giannis at this or find Kawhi Leonard here or Steve Nash there. I think those are all 15 guys. That sounds good, but generally the best players are found towards the top of the draft, and that's the reason we've had such a jockeying position to get up there.

So the probabilities are what they are. 12 is a good pick, but it's not like a given that we'll find something there that's going to impact the roster.

**Q. You mentioned lottery reform. It's getting a major overhaul, just all the stuff that's going on with that. Can you give just thoughts on that in general?**

SAM PRESTI: I think it's a tremendously difficult position for Adam to be the commissioner of the league and have

that be such a significant narrative when we're having such an incredible regular season during the year.

I understand there's a tension, bottom line, between how you can get the teams that need the help the best available players because, no matter how you slice it, 20 to 25 of the 30 teams rely on the draft to build a sustainable team because it's not just access to the players, but it's also the ability to retain the players in a lot of places that's very hard to do. That's very hard to do.

So his feeling -- and I support him 100 percent -- is that the methodology to get there, because there's such an increase the last few years in trying to position to get those higher draft picks, it was taking away from the games themselves, taking away from a product. And he made a very clear argument in my mind about the business ramifications of what we were dealing with.

So I think the solution is good in the short term for sure. The best part about it to me is that it sunsets in three years. So we're not boxed into relying on such a luck-driven solution. Hopefully we can get to a point where we have a system that isn't tied to record entirely. But that will take some time to work that through.

Now, I think people that -- you know, as a result of this solution, there will be a subset of teams that are significantly advantaged by the way that these odds are going to work and how they choose to build their teams, and I think there will be some concern about the complexity of a different type of system, you know, if we move through this and hopefully get to another version.

But what I would say is you can have a simple solution with a lot of unpredictable consequences, or you can have a more sophisticated solution with more predictable consequences. So there's a lot of things about the NBA that are not simple. The teams are going for billions of dollars. There's an amazing amount of attention on the games, but people don't know the clear path rule. People don't know what the gather rule is really. People don't know how the second apron works.

So I think we should be concerning ourselves with what's the best solution, not what's the simplest, in anything we do. So if this turns out to be the best solution, we should stay with that. But I think there's eyes wide open to the way they -- the way the odds could fall in this, but I think Adam showed tremendous leadership and brought everybody together, and I think everybody, as they say, put their league hat on to get behind this because it's important for the product.

**Q. Last year the kind of narratives and discourse**

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**around your team maybe shifted into what one would call a toxic narrative around your guys. What would you attribute that to or kind of your feelings on that?**

SAM PRESTI: I think a couple things. One, part of it is like it just kind of comes with the territory, and that's to be expected. When we have success, it's just kind of the way the world has been.

I think the change to that -- and it's not necessarily a complaint, but I'm just trying to answer what you're saying, is there's like an architecture or an infrastructure to the way that social media works, and we've seen it with how we talk about our politics and what that's done, and it's clearly making its way into sports. It's the same model.

I think it's tough because I don't think it's changing, but we also have to understand like it's an incentive-based business. There's people that have financial incentives -- I was saying to someone in our office the other day, it's a black market for anger, division, tribalism, and just kind of ugly discourse, right? And people are very skilled at it. You know, I hate to say it, but they're very skilled at it.

People have career ambitions too. It could be somebody that is trying to get a better job somewhere else, and they understand that this is making its rounds. So they jump on that.

The redeeming reality to the whole thing, in my opinion, is that's not the real world because you could have two people that are screaming at each other or whatever on this -- I really don't have any of it. But it finds me in screenshots and things people are sending to me. But you put them in a room together, they'll watch the game together and have a beer, just like you have disagreements about other things.

I think the worst thing we could do as a league is to start to believe that's actually the way our fans think or feel because it's all manipulated. Now, some people are manipulating it -- you know, it's tribalism. It's fandom. It's always been there. But sometimes it does matter how big and how loud the one group is. If you're playing a specific team, it feels really big, but they're just rooting for their team, but it's in a much more sophisticated way of making their points.

Again, it's where we're at, but I don't think it's real all the time. So we're going to have to live through that if we're successful. If we're not successful, people are not going to care about us, and you won't see the clip video and the this and the that. It's just, you know -- but I think the same model is being used in sports, and it's inside our sports, inside our fans, but it's not when you interact with the real

fans, the people that they're not incentivized or they're -- they don't consume the game for that purpose to find the weakness in everybody.

**Q. There was a report that you were kind of consulted or talked with by Cleveland when they made the Myles Garrett trade. How often does that happen, and what is the relationship-building process like through sport when they talk to those guys?**

SAM PRESTI: First, I saw that, and I have a personal relationship with Andrew for several years now, but he's not calling me for advice. I thought that was hilarious. Yeah, he's not calling me for advice.

But I value my relationships with a lot of different people in sports, and I've done it long enough now where I've met a lot of different people and I've developed friendships with these people. I think, when you do -- it's probably the same thing for you guys. When you do the same thing or you have the same line of work, those people can kind of understand a little bit like certain things about your job or things that -- it's no different than anything else. We all share in that.

So I value those relationships, but Andrew's not like calling me and asking me -- at some point I'm sure we talked about different things, transactions and things like that, but no. It sounds like that was a great trade for both sides. I'm wishing him the best. It's awesome.

**Q. This team has multiple times talked about joy, togetherness, connection. As expectations continue to rise, how do you protect those qualities from being replaced by the pressure of winning every year and reaching that pinnacle every year?**

SAM PRESTI: Again, I don't think it's something you can try to manufacture that. I thought this past season coming into the year we were pretty direct about we have to separate from last year's success to give this team a chance to have success because the repeat -- the champion from the previous year didn't make it out of the second round for seven years, I don't know. I know that stat in September.

So there was a lot of talk about can we somehow break the mold. I'm happy to say we got off to a great start. Our guys were able to certainly not get weighed down by the success of last year. I don't think they got complacent or comfortable. I think they realized we were going to have to start the season without Jalen, and they were tremendous coming out of the gates. I think it showed so much maturity, a lot of wisdom.

Going forward, these are things you have to contend with, and I also wouldn't -- I would expect there to be some rough patches along the way because sometimes we want things to be so clean and tidy, you know what I mean, but when you do that, you're trying to control that. Sometimes you have to let it go and develop in a way that is more natural.

I've learned that in my career now. You have a vision -- when you're beginning something, the only thing you have is the concept and the vision to begin with, but once you start, you really have to surrender kind of that control and allow things to kind of go where they're supposed to go and -- now, you need to influence some things here and there, but if you're so tied to where you started from, it's like trying to grow a flower in a jar. The flower is not supposed to curl around that jar, you're putting it there. Sometimes if it's meant to go a different direction, then you have to adjust and adapt to that and feed it the best that you can.

Same thing with what you're talking about. There may be some periods of time where we show that. There may be some times where there is frustration or things like that. That's natural in real relationships. If it's a real relationship, there will be some difficult moments, but they ultimately make everyone stronger, and you're going to know how somebody's feeling or if something is weighing on somebody. And the family component is you work them through it.

**Q. At the deadline you guys acquired McCain. You mentioned trade machine. I don't think too many people had him pegged. What was your evaluation of getting him in here and how he handled the situation of jumping on a moving train and playing in the playoffs and looking pretty comfortable his first time out there?**

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, I followed Jared since he was in high school and have always thought very highly of him, just his makeup, his approach, his game. I've always felt like he's a guy that contributes to winning. I do think that with kind of the way he got on the train, as you were saying, his EQ is extremely high. There aren't many people that I would choose to try to assimilate into our particular team in the middle of the year, especially because the continuity issue was already very fractured because we didn't know who was playing, and there the thought of we could really use another person because every night we're kind of shorthanded. Certainly couldn't have forecasted the situation we were going to be in in the postseason. He was very, very helpful in that.

But he had the right mindset, I think, to walk into a team like ours and in the right game. But I think going forward there's a more balanced player in there and not just a guy

that's going to come off and be able to hit shots like that. He really understands the game. He understands winning. He'll put his body out there.

I'm looking forward to a full summer with him, full training camp, and just seeing really how he accents our full team. I don't know how many games he played with Jalen, but I don't think it was very many. With our starters, he would have had to be here for one of those eight games, so I'm not sure if he was or he wasn't.

That's one of the things that's a little troubling when you're looking at learning from each one of these series that we're in. You're just not getting to see how we all look when fully constituted, especially in the bigger games like that in the postseason. It's really, really helpful and informative.

Back to Justin's question about Chet, I think having another ball handler out there really would have not just helped everyone -- Shai for sure -- but it really would have helped Chet quite a bit too, you know what I'm saying? So different personnel, you get a different look at things. We certainly can't -- you can't build your approach or evaluate or strategize your approach going forward for a team that's missing Ajay and Jalen, right? We can't build the team that way based on what we learned in that series.

It was very helpful, we learned a lot in that series, as we did in L.A., as we did against Phoenix, Indiana, Minnesota, all down the line, Denver. We learn in every one of those, but you don't want to overlearn the team when it's missing those types of players because I think it can warp your perception of the other players, and also we want to be playing with everybody. That's the idea. And McCain fits right into that in so many ways.

The other thing about that transaction is we were able to orchestrate that without going to luxury tax, which is a big factor because now we continue to maintain the fact we won't be a repeater tax, repeater team until we're in the new arena and we have a new CBA. So that was important for us to be able to follow that threshold but still be able to add a player of that caliber.

**Q. There's been a lot of talk about the physicality in the playoffs, specifically the Western Conference Finals, the appearance Wemby called in a hit on McCain using Plumlee, the Carter Bryant hard fouls on Shai. What's your take on that?**

SAM PRESTI: You didn't hear us complaining. You know, we're not complaining. We just want to know what the rules are, and we'll play by those.

**Q. Will you take us through the roller coaster season**

**of Topic and kind of with this organization's support, kind of what you first thought and what you maybe learned from that.**

SAM PRESTI: Talking about just his experiences this year?

**Q. Going through the organization and everything that went around (indiscernible) that's sort of bigger than sports.**

SAM PRESTI: It was something that none of us have experienced. There's something about his maturity and how he handled that. I just can't underscore that enough. It's an unbelievable approach to all that in very, very difficult circumstance. Our medical staff, Donnie Strack, was -- I'm thinking of a better word than superlative, but just humane and empathetic, just unbelievable during that period of time.

I think our players were great in terms of recognizing his situation and being there for him. He's got a great support system with his family. His mom and dad are great people, and it's a very tough time for them too.

I remember thinking distinctly -- you know, we were at MD Anderson in Houston, and I remember walking in there with him. I'm walking behind a guy that's 6'6" and 200-plus pounds. This is a big person. And he's walking through here, and you just -- there's so many people. It was a real reality moment, but there's this big strong guy, and he's an amazing, physical person, but he had a real battle on his hands.

I'm very proud of him. I think he's going to have just like a monster summer -- finally because last year he was recovering from the knee. Obviously this year was a challenge because just to get him up to speed and get him enough games in the G-League to get some conditioning, but he's a real talented player. So we're really looking forward to seeing him. He's going to play Summer League, and we'll get him back out there. But he showed tremendous perseverance.

I was really proud of our entire program to give him enough space but support him, and he makes it easy to support him.

**Q. With the Spurs looking like a long-term obstacle, how do you balance making moves to make your team better as a whole versus trying to build a team to handle that specific matchup, especially when they have a guy like Wemby who is so unique?**

SAM PRESTI: I think the first thing goes back to the fact

that you're going to learn from every series, like I said before. Win or lose. But I think what we've always focused on is how do we build the best version of ourselves. That starts for us with not being closed-minded about how we play. So the last three years, we've played and adjusted and adapted, I think, three kind of different ways. We were able to get to the outcomes that we got to.

So being really open like to how we get better because you cannot predict your opponents, you can't predict -- we don't get to start next season playing teams from last season. And we won't be the same either. You have to -- and I also think you have to have a tremendous amount of respect for the entire Western Conference. Just think about the entire Western Conference and how good all these teams are.

I think the best course of action is how do we get better, how do we improve, what makes us a more difficult team to play against? I don't think you can centralize everything about one particular team. I mean, if somebody was building their entire roster around Denver or Boston or us, they'd be disappointed because those teams weren't there at the end.

So I think it's mostly about yourself. That's always how we've looked at it. Certainly he presents, as him as a player, he's a tremendous player. In the history of the league, there are players that come in are uniquely different, and he's 8 feet tall playing on a 10-foot basket, that's going to change some things. But I also think that that helps elevate everybody. When you're playing against that particular team, you're going to have to continue to find ways to compete against someone with the physical advantages of that kind.

But you also have to be adaptable to playing against all these other great players in the NBA as well, and most of that comes down to how do you build out your best version of yourself? That's kind of how we've always looked at it.

**Q. Shai after the season said he would step away and let you handle all the transactions. Is that the way you look at it? Will you want to include him on anything you do this summer?**

SAM PRESTI: I'm always talking to our players. I have more or less made a career out of listening to people who are much smarter than me, and also that would include like learning a lot from the players I've been around my entire career. I may not -- all my conversations aren't necessarily going to somebody for input, but just a lot of the conversations that I'm having with the players are just I like to learn from them and understand what they're seeing.

That started for me back in San Antonio, unbelievable. I



rebounded for Steve Kerr, which wasn't very hard, and just kind of stood under the basket. So we had a lot of conversations because I didn't have to move. Danny Ferry and him, I'd ask them a million questions. Malik Rose was unbelievable. I learned so much from him.

I could listen to Robert Horry talk about Vernon Maxwell stories all day. Because I asked Robert, Who was the best teammate you ever had? Boom. So I became really interested in Mad Max and what made him great.

Then Stephen Jackson was unbelievable to me as a young -- I was 24, 25 years old, and he had all kinds of answers for me and time for me. I could go all down the line, Ginobili. I mean, I was very lucky.

Then you talk about that taking it to here, and like we've had guys like Perk, who like he had a Ph.D. from Boston coming in here when we got him here. I learned a lot. Perk, Chris Paul, I mean, down the line. We've had so many guys like that, and I've learned so much from those particular individuals and others.

Shai is the same, like I love talking to him and understand what he's seeing and what he's thinking during the season. When it comes to these types of things, you know, look, I'm never going to put him in a position where it could be -- it could compromise him with anybody or his teammates or anything like that. I know how to handle that. I would never do that. Ultimately, like I have to make the best decisions for the team. I hope I have enough of a relationship with him where we can talk and I can decide what I feel we need to do.

But I know, for the most part, where I stand with the guys. I think they understand I have a job I have to do. I have other people I have to work with too. We have a coaching staff, we have ownership, and my role is to hear everybody and try to come up with the solutions that can work for everybody's goals, and I'm excited to try to do that.

**Q. Everything we've talked about today virtually is are the answers the same if we'd be meeting two weeks from now and you'd won the title? In other words, process over results is something that you guys talk about, all these things that you're going to follow and you're going to do independent of whether you've won a second straight championship?**

SAM PRESTI: I mean, go back to last year. I think that's your answer. We were saying the same stuff after we won the title. Check the transcript, I guess. I mean, yeah, that's kind of how we've looked at things. We've never tried to chase outcomes. I think that can get you in big binds. I think you can also rob yourself of improvement. I think it's

harder to understand where miscalculations or areas of improvement could be if you don't have that kind of mindset.

I think the way we look at things is there's two types of people or two types of approaches. There's you could take a bridge approach or you could take a highway. The bridge is I'll do it because it's the -- I have no other option, and if I do it, I can get to the other side. Then I'll just get back to doing what I was always doing. It's a way of overcoming an obstacle, and you'll try it because you have to do it or because you want something so bad, but then once you get there, you're kind of like where's the next thing I've got to do? It's very transactional.

I think the highway, when I think about it, it's just think about Route 66 all the way down. You're just trying to continuously improve. You don't need these external things to motivate you. You're motivated by pursuing the progress itself, and therefore, when you get outcomes that are very favorable like we did last year, or this year, however we would categorize the outcome based on the circumstances and how far we had come to get there, I'm disappointed we're not playing, but it was a helluva effort to get there based on what happened in the series and the quality of opponent as well.

But it allows us to keep going because we're not rooted in just like, hey, we need something else to stimulate our improvement.

So my answer to that is it's kind of how we've done it for 18 years, and that's just how we chose to do it. I'm not saying it's the best way, but it's positioned us well so that, if things do go our way, we can find a level of success that I think is hard to get if you're just kind of randomly punching.

**Q. A minute ago, to Curtis' question, you were talking about learning different things from different people. I know that you obviously can learn from experience too. You were obviously on the job the first iteration of championship-level team here. I'm wondering, even though with the changes to the CBA and other rules and things that have happened over time, did you learn anything that you'll now try to use in this instance to try to keep the team at the highest level possible for the longest stretch?**

SAM PRESTI: I think, again, we've been here for 18 years, and we've had so many different things that have been kind of like thrown at us over that period of time, and we do, we've learned from every single experience that we've had.

I think -- yeah, I think there are some things there for sure

that you learn from, and I think that's like generally everybody in that regard. I think you also learn like how rare it is to win at the highest level, to have a contending team in like a perennial way. We're very, very fortunate to be in these types of days.

But we're also in a new -- we're kind of in a new era, so it's a little bit different. Like I said, we're positioned extremely well. We have had ample time to prepare for this. It doesn't mean that it makes it like less of a challenge in some ways, but this is exactly where you want to be. You want to be in this situation. As I said, we have 15 players that we really like all under contract for next season.

And it's not a theoretical team in the sense that we've demonstrated that we can win at a high level. I hate to get up here and like reel off the numbers, but I mean, our margin of victory over the last three years is the highest, along with Golden State team that had Durant, and also some of the Bulls teams. So we know what we're capable of.

As I said in my opening statement, that doesn't mean you're going to make your mark every single year. That's just not how this works. The I mean, we've talked about people not repeating in the modern NBA, and there's a reason for that.

But we've had ample time to prepare, and we're doing a lot of things so we can have that. Like we have a master plan for our practice facility. We have all this land to the south of us. It's ready, but we're waiting on that. We're not hitting go on that so that we can invest into the team itself.

So those are the types of decisions we've been making along the way so we can position the team to, like I said, in the first 20, 25 years, stack as many memorable years, create as many great experiences for our fans.

As I said before, we look at it less about paying for a team as we are giving back to the fans to the best that we can. We're not -- we know there's challenges and there's going to be limitations, but just because we're here, I don't think we should be told that we shouldn't dream as big or go as hard as a team on the coast. If we have a team that's capable or demonstrated it's capable, I mean, that's the competitor in all of us in the organization and with our ownership, so we're going to put our best foot forward.

Where that takes us, I won't be able to tell you that until the summer, but it's going to be a group effort. I'm pretty confident that we want to keep it going as long as we can.

**Q. Much was made of Shai's free throws, ability to draw fouls, and it wasn't just like people on social**

**media. We also heard criticism from opposing coaches and players. What did you make of just that conversation?**

SAM PRESTI: Of all the things that I've talked to Shai about, this is actually one I've never talked to him about. He's probably going to kill me for talking about this, truthfully.

First of all, let me just start with the opposing coaches for one second. The post-game press conference has turned into the bully pulpit to create competitive advantage. I mean, we know what that is. It used to be you'd get up there, you'd talk about your own team. Now everyone gets up there and they talk about the officials and they discredit the other team. Again, like they're great competitors, so we know why that's happening, and I don't fault them because I think they may think it works.

So the question is why are they continuing to do it? Because there's financial incentives not to do it. But everyone's competing. Let's also recognize that it's the bully pulpit for competitive advantage, and that's what it's kind of turned into, which is part of competing. We all get that.

Relative to Shai and the narrative on that, he's playing against six people. He's got five defenders, and the sixth defender is social media. That's a reality. He's not going to be the last player that the machine decides to target, but no one's going to handle it as gracefully because, when they turn it on somebody else, they're not going to step up there every night and not acknowledge it.

A couple things more just on the whole topic. We think all the time or we hear all the time about things that people don't like about the NBA, which are inaccurate, but they're narratives that exist on the alternate reality. One, players don't play defense. Shai's a two-end player. Now, he plays with four or five All-NBA defensive players, so sometimes his defensive ability gets undersold, but he plays two ends.

Second, all NBA players do is complain, bitch and moan and try to intimidate the officials with bad behavior in the games to give foul calls. He's gotten three technical fouls this year. None for complaining. One for waving a towel in support of someone that hit a shot that doesn't play very often. Okay. So he's not doing that.

The other thing is load management. Nobody plays. They take all these games off. Shai plays every night. He missed a bunch of games this year for an oblique strain, and we might give him a night off two or three times a year, maybe. But he plays back-to-backs. He plays heavy

minutes. He plays against good teams. He plays against teams that are bad teams. He plays every night. His consistency is well documented. So you can't get him on that.

The next one is all you do is shoot 3s. NBA players, all they do is shoot 3s. Okay. Well, he's brought the mid-range back to an art form. He's transcendent for any generation, any player. That's why like older players love his game.

It's also one of the reasons he gets fouled a lot. Because he plays in the mid-range because we don't call the landing space fouls in the mid-range the way we do at the 3-point line, right, because he's avoiding that oftentimes because there's too many bodies in there. With the 3-point shot, you can see it easily, and I think a lot of times he's trying to avoid that. So he's not a guy that's just launching 3s. So we can check that off the box.

The other one is like these guys are just totally inaccessible. They're in their own world. Well, the guy signs 400 autographs before every game. Before the Western Conference Finals Game 7, he's signing autographs.

So we've got a litany of things that generally the narrative is about NBA players that they do wrong. Well, based on those narratives, I don't agree with them, but he would be doing them right. And he doesn't really complain about any of it. So if we're just talking about trying to draw fouls, well, every other great player in the NBA, that's part of the game is drawing fouls.

He drew 415 fouls this year; 11 were challenged. 11. Four of those were overturned. So that's like 2 1/2 percent of the foul calls were actually challenged. Again, that's part of the bully pulpit part of this thing, which I get and it's part of competing.

As far as those fouls, I think in the fouls drawn -- I had this written down here -- he's tied with Embiid for 8 and 9 in terms of number of fouls drawn in the season. 6 and 7 are Jaylen Brown and Wembanyama. So that's kind of the group of players that he's in.

But I understand, if you listen to the narrative, you'd think he's 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. He drew a lot more fouls before we got much better, and when we got better, obviously people pay much more attention to him.

We'll have to see where that goes, you know what I mean? We don't know. He'll never say anything about it. And the only thing I'm pointing out is I don't think he's being unfairly handled, I just think, instead of talking about something

that we are looking to find as a negative, can we please also acknowledge that he also does a lot of positive things for the game, most of which are the things that people are very unhappy -- not unhappy, but they don't like on social media. And I know that a lot of us live on social media. I would think they would love him for that reason.

This is like the world we live in today. There's a lot of financial incentive to create these things, career ambitions, like I said before. The best thing we can do when those things happen is stay above it.

Now I'm pointing it out now at the end of the season, but we're going to have to stay above it because it's probably not going to change. But he does a lot of good things too.

**Q. This is a bit lighthearted but also coming from a music snob. Last couple years you've snuck in Charlie Haden, Art Blakey, and stuff like that. I want to know where it comes from. I want to know what uncle, what dad, what record you picked up as a kid. You're notoriously like you don't talk about yourself, but this is, I think, the time to talk about that.**

SAM PRESTI: Well, I started playing the drums when I was in nursery school, like very, very young, yeah. Probably -- I mean, my dad's record collection, he had a killer record collection. So just looking at all those. And obviously the artwork on those are just amazing, like "Are You Experienced" record, Hendrix's first record, "Sgt. Pepper's," The Doors records, those type of things. He had James Brown, Sly and the Family Stone, all the Miles records.

So that probably got me into it early on and just playing at a young age. Again, that's just the -- I enjoy that part of my inner life, so to speak, and it's a big part of how I think about things. Yeah, I make a lot of associations at everyone else's expense because they probably hate it and think it's stupid, but it's kind of how I see the world and it helps me in what I have to do from -- I guess you're a left brain and a right brain, and that's just been part of my life.

But I think it probably started early on and then had a lot of different influences through that.

**Q. Sam, did you learn anything new about Thomas Sorber during his rehab process? It's probably still ongoing. 20 years old, 6'10", 6'7" wing span, how can he help this team going forward?**

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, Thomas, he's really impressed me. I think Mark talked about this as well, but we have some experience with some of our younger guys not being able to play in games their rookie year, and he just dove into his

rehab. His work capacity has impressed me. Obviously all the reasons we drafted him, just great ability to pass, he's physical, and I think his body's gotten better through this year.

I don't think he'll be ready to go for Summer League. We want to be a little careful. If you remember, Topic's surgery was in July and Sorber was later. So I think we're going to miss it by just a little bit.

But he's made great progress, he looks great, and I think his -- like he's really demonstrated great professional habits for a young player and very excited to get him back out on the floor.

During the year there were so many times where during the year, if Top or Sorber was available, we had to play him 30 minutes because we needed them, you know what I mean? We were so shorthanded on so many occasions. But he'll hit the ground running. We're really excited about him.

**Q. You talk about bringing in a specific kind of person to, like, the locker room. What does the process look like for you specifically in the draft or how you evaluate who these guys are?**

SAM PRESTI: I don't know. It's spending time knowing them a little bit is always helpful, although it's not mandatory, but it's helpful. You can't imagine the number of times you're watching these people play, you know what I mean? Look, everyone's doing the same thing, so I don't mean this to come across as like we're doing anything different. And I think there's probably teams even doing a better job or different things than what I'm going to describe.

But just watching the way people interact. I don't think it's any different than if you were bringing some -- if you have something you care about, if you have something that you care about and means a lot to you, that's going to make you very, very committed to understanding and studying something or someone that you could be bringing close to that.

I think it all comes from how much you care about the thing you're trying to preserve or improve. So you want to just -- you have a few things that you think are important that you just can't imagine someone walking the halls of your world, so to speak, your place of work, if they don't have those things. That doesn't mean they're not a good person. It just means how can we help the guys? That's a big part of how we've always looked at it is how can we help the players improve? Not just can they play, what are they going to do for us?

I think there's -- I've always talked about mutual commitment, and there's a mutual commitment of reaching the player where they're at in a nonjudgmental way and figuring out if you can join together to explore their potential as a professional player, and in doing so, how will that help the team?

Because you can't make the developmental path for a player override the team dynamic or what you're trying to accomplish as a team, but if you can find a way to do that under the umbrella of team development -- and there's certain guys that will really thrive in that type of a situation. There's others that may have a harder time thinking that way.

So it's a lot of small, different data points, interactions, conversations with people. Again, there's nothing novel about it. I don't think it's as much about the input; I think it's more about the internal study of your own environment, of your own team, and the evolution of that and understanding kind of like who can thrive with you and who will have a harder time for various reasons. But it's not a judgment on character at all.

I think the quality of the guys in the draft for such a long time now, tremendous. It's tremendous the quality of the kids. They're great kids, you know.

**Q. Cason Wallace here last week was talking about just he wants to compete. He's driven by that. At some point his contract will be a discussion next year. Where do you see his advancement with his role on the team and how that plays into your contract discussions?**

SAM PRESTI: Let me start with just him as a player. He's taken strides every year he's been here. He's a competitor. That's how he's wired. I'm really proud of him and the way he's handled himself, the way he's competed, improvements he's made as far as like extensions and things like that. Like I said, we're going to have to get to that at the appropriate time.

As I said, there's all these different people I have to speak to and try to create some type of pathway or a series of options that we can try to address as many different things as we can. And as I said earlier, like one of the solutions or one of the options could well be just kind of keeping everybody rolling into next year and then really looking at everything with a more open mind the following year.

But I won't know kind of where we are with him or anyone else until I get deeper into some of these conversations, and these conversations are -- they're just wide ranging in

a lot of ways, and I want to give them the proper time. So we'll see. Obviously he's a tremendous player and his best basketball is in front of him for sure.

**Q. So you were a part of the Spurs organization when they were winning a couple of championships, and one of the things they were known for was not being able to win consecutively, consecutive championships. Are there any lessons that you gleaned from that time, from your time there, that you can use for this team as they try to climb that mountain again after failing this year?**

SAM PRESTI: I'm only smiling because it brings me back to that period of time, you know what I mean? I was fortunate to be there for three of those. Had nothing to do with any of them, but I happened to be there at the right time.

I think the first thing is you -- every year is its own year, you know what I mean? Every year is its own year, and every year is going to present a series of challenges that are unique from the prior year that you got there.

As I said in my opening statement, the barriers to doing it twice, there's so many of them that you can't even list them, but the number one barrier is that it's really hard to do it one time, you know what I mean? Because you need so many things to fall in your favor.

As I was answering Barry's question earlier and as I said in the open, one of the main topics when I sat up here in June of last year was recognizing the role of good fortune. So many small things have to go your way, and when they do, you have to be grateful for that and realize like it's a special opportunity to win and capitalize because it's such a long season, the competition is so good.

I think the Spurs did a great job always of putting the previous season behind them. You can see Pop's influence on the current team right now, even in our series, because it seems that he's pretty involved and has a hand in a lot of different things. You can kind of feel that in some ways.

But it's mostly just controlling what you can, not letting the previous season be a forecast for anything other than what it was. And then I think the Spurs at that particular time had built up a ton of continuity. When I was there toward the middle, I guess, of Tony, Tim, and Manu, we were kind of all in there primed together, and that was, to me, I was just very lucky to be able to witness that.

But they had had some tough series, leading up to the first one, as a matter of fact, some disappointing playoff

showings, but perseverance and short memory in some ways, willing to adapt, but a core belief and understanding that it's supposed to be hard.

**Q. Given as you were talking about different players and people you talked to in the past and sort of their influence on you, you mentioned Tim Duncan, whether it be the even-keeled nature, leadership, consistency, being a great teammate, what sort of through lines or similarities do you see between him and a guy like Shai?**

SAM PRESTI: I learned this a long -- I learned this pretty long time ago, people love to compare and contrast players, but I don't think you can compare and contrast people, especially -- you know what I mean? Everyone is their own version of themselves.

As I'm thinking about it, at the top of the list of two people that wouldn't want you talking about them in a high regard would be those two guys. They wouldn't want you talking about them or how great they are because they're just -- they do have a very selfless, that's pretty common. But I wouldn't compare those two guys because I don't think it's fair to either one of them.

I just know how grateful I am to have ever been around some of these guys and get to work with a large portion of guys that have come through our organization and also in San Antonio. It's not lost on me. I'm sitting here in front of you because of Tim, Tony, and Manu. That's never been lost on me, and then I've been afforded to continue to sit in front of you because of all the players we've had here. So I look at it that way.

I think, as I reflect also, I think about some of the great players we played in playoff series here. We played Dirk Nowitzki, Kobe, Duncan -- Duncan's final game was on our court. We've played LeBron and Dwyane Wade when they were together in Miami. I'm leaving out so many people, but like the Hall of Fame names that we've played in big playoff series in Oklahoma City.

Pretty remarkable to have been in some of these series together and competing against these teams at the highest level over the years. So that's never lost on me, just to be in these types of games and in these types of settings. It's a tremendous privilege to be around that level of competition.

**Q. What are you reading this summer?**

SAM PRESTI: I've got a few books and a plug. I read a book about Bill Evans. He's a Jazz piano player and just like a pretty influential one. Played on "Kind of Blue" and

was in one of Miles' great bands. It was a great book. I think it's called "How My Heart Sings."

I'm reading a book on Ron Carter, who is a bass player like in one of Miles' second bands. He's a person that I literally -- I could listen to this guy talk all day. He's got videos on YouTube and interviews. I literally could sit there and listen to Ron Carter talk all day. He is such a class person and such a craftsman. So I'm reading his book called "Finding the Right Notes."

One of the albums that was -- you had mentioned, Jerry, like Miles Smiles. That's like Ron Carter's killing it on that album. So that was my first introduction to him. So I'm reading this book about him.

I got a book about Wes Anderson, the filmmaker. It's kind of like a coffee table book. It's got unbelievable pictures in it. He did several movies that I like, and I think he's a really creative person and marches to the beat of his own drum and has a great -- I'm fascinated by his mind and his ability to bring these tremendous actors together. Just a really, really interesting person.

I got that book, I was back in -- we were at my hometown in Concord, and everything's pretty much the same in Concord. Like in a good way. It's very preserved in a way that makes me feel very good going back there. There's a bookstore since I was -- I was probably getting coloring books in there.

But I happened to be walking by the window, and there was this Wes Anderson book, and I was like, man. So I popped in there and got it. So I have that book, and I've flipped through that a few different times. Like I said, the pictures are amazing.

Then the other book that I wanted to talk about was -- so I have -- back to my roots here. A woman that I grew up with, her name's Lindsay Krasnoff. She has a Ph.D. in history. She was definitely responsible for my low confidence in my academics when I was growing up, but she's brilliant. Anyway, she's created a whole career based on sports diplomacy, and she's written a whole book called "Basketball Empire" about the rise of basketball in France.

Obviously the poignant part about that is that obviously we grew up in this small town. She played in the -- I think she played the clarinet. We grew up together from kindergarten to high school, and she went to all these prestigious colleges and a million degrees, but Tony Parker obviously has played a big role in what she's writing about and obviously had a big influence on why I'm sitting in front of you today, but it's a tremendous book. It's very much

about just the diplomacy nature of relationships and government and how sports can transcend things.

I just watched one of her talks the other day on YouTube that she did in Boston. She's got great command over all this stuff. Anyway, it's called "Basketball Empire." So that was another one that I wanted to talk about. It's really well done.

Appreciate everybody for being here and putting up with your questions about the music. We're looking forward to great off-season, and like I said before, getting back to work and starting again.

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