Oklahoma City Thunder
Media Conference

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Sam Presti

Press Conference

SAM PRESTI: I guess, first off, I just want to thank everybody for coming and being here today as we begin the 19th chapter in Thunder history.

These conversations always begin by me speaking directly to our fans, so I'm going to make an opening statement, lay some things out for our fans and our community, then happy to take any questions that people have. We'll take it from there.

Most people know that these conversations are always about what's next and what's coming, turning the page, moving to the next season in hand in our journey, but I'd be remiss if I didn't start a little bit by reflecting on a few different individuals that were big impacts in our organizational history.

I want to just recognize the contributions of Lu, Wiggs and Isaiah. Those players were not just great players for us, but they were tremendous professionals, and also real, real assets to the community. Just great human beings. We're very grateful for their contributions, and also want to wish them the best of luck in their new situations and know they'll do great.

I also want to take a moment to congratulate Russell on just an unbelievable career, Hall of Fame career. We're very fortunate that a lot of those years took place in Oklahoma City. Much has been talked about with respect to his on-court play, but I think his attitude, his mentality, those types of things also were huge boosts to our community, and I think we're well-regarded, and obviously his involvement today here is still pretty remarkable. So we're really excited and happy for him.

I know people might want to ask me later on if we have plans or what we're going to do to recognize him. I can tell you we don't have a firm plan yet, but we're certainly working on that. We want to make sure it's done with great intention, and we'll fill you in when we have a chance.

I do want to mention that on November 2, Russell will be honored by the Memorial. We're having the Day One Luncheon. We have it every year. It's the countdown to the anniversary of the bombing. He'll be there. Hopefully people will come out, buy the tables, support the cause, and we hope to see everybody there.

Before we talk about the coming season, I want to talk a little bit about the league and the changes in the league that we're building our team and organization to compete within. The reason why is because I think everybody can look around and understand that the NBA is changing positively. We see this with changes in the franchise values. We see this in the way the franchises are being sold. We see this in the economics across the board. We see this in the rules of team building and how the aprons are having an effect on different things.

We're seeing change with respect to how many teams we might potentially have in the NBA with potentially two premier markets in Las Vegas and Seattle entering the equation down the road. We're seeing the influence internationally potentially grow with NBA Europe.

We're seeing the competition itself change with the advent of the 3-2-1 Lottery, what that could potentially mean, the growth of the NBA Cup, the role of gambling and prediction markets and what those potential regulations could bring about down the road.

So we're seeing a time of tremendous growth and tremendous change, and of course no one can predict the future, but I think we can use history, as we often do in these conversations with our fans, to try to understand what this moment could potentially mean for the league and ultimately for our organization.

I think the best way to do that in my opinion is to always look at history, and I think there's a window of time in the early '80s that could be extremely informative for us to understand where Adam Silver and his group could potentially be taking us and the role we could play in that, and that's the window of time from 1983 to 1990.

A lot of fans were created during that window of time. It takes us back to the first CBA in 1983, and it was also the first drug policy. Both of those things came in together. Believe it or not, David Stern wasn't the commissioner at that time, but he was the lead negotiator. An owner named Dick Bloch, who was instrumental in many, many league

affairs who owned the Phoenix Suns at the time, brought the Suns to Phoenix, was instrumental in getting the CBA accomplished.

At the time, only six of the 23 teams were profitable in the early '80s. By 1990, 20 of the 23 teams were profitable. Team valuations had tripled. The league had, believe it or not, three primary sponsors at that time in the early '80s: Schick razors, Spalding -- they did provide the balls -- and Miller beer.

By 1990 they were up to 20 including Coke, Gatorade and Nike. So big, big changes.

Within that period of time, once the CBA came into effect, we had four expansion teams. We had Miami, Minnesota, Charlotte and Orlando by 1990. By 1990, there were seven new arenas opened by 1990.

So a lot of major, major transitions from one small decision.

Then think about it from an international standpoint. In 1987, David Stern, I'm sure Rick Welts and Russ Granik who were right there on his hip, created something called the McDonald's Cup where it was the first time European teams played NBA teams.

So Milwaukee played a team from Italy in a round-robin -- Mike D'Antoni was a player on that team -- and the Soviet national team played. Sabonis wasn't in that game, but Marciulionis was.

Why am I bringing that up? Because it was a germ of an idea that ultimately led to the Dream Team, Russ Granik again pioneering that. It scaled to such an event that we're still seeing the benefits of the Dream Team with the influx of international players and, I would say, even the idea of having a league in Europe.

So again, 1987 was a small idea that led to something big. Broadcast-wise, if we think about this, the Finals were on tape delay in the early '80s. Why? Because they couldn't compete with sweeps in May because "The Dukes of Hazzard" and "Dynasty" and "M.A.S.H." were dominating them. So there was a small change made to the schedule, pushed it back a little bit.

In combination with some of these other changes that were put in place in the early 1980s, by 1990, Dick Ebersol at NBC, our good friends at NBC, signed a $600 million deal with the NBA that was seven times what it was in the early '80s.

But it always comes down to people, and in this case an unbelievable group of owners at that time -- Jerry Buss entered the league, Bill Davidson with Detroit, I mentioned Dick Bloch, and many others -- were working together, without self-interest, for one reason: To build a sustainable business for themselves and their partners.

We think about where we've gotten to today. But the players are always what makes the biggest difference in the NBA. In 1983 and 1984 -- this really shocked me -- all 10 All-Star Game starters were Hall of Fame players, went on to be Hall of Fame players.

Think about in '84, not only were that group of All-Stars become Hall of Fame players, but there was also a transformational draft in which Michael Jordan, Olajuwon, Barkley and Stockton all entered the league at the same time.

So you have this culmination of things that was led by a generation of players that created something special.

What do we learn from all this? It probably seems like it's very unrelated, but the fact is that it's actually really all connected together, and when you connect it all together, it's what helped elevate the NBA to the golden era of the early 1990s. And it came down to a group of people of their generation who were fighting relentlessly to protect the soul of the game but also fighting relentlessly to build the business and the industry simultaneously.

I think the same is true today. I think the current initiatives of the league are putting us on the doorstep of another great era to come. We as an organization, quite frankly, we want to be and have the choice to be a part of that when that comes around.

But the key for us is to not let all of these different initiatives, all of these different irons in the fire distract us from the main thing and to keep it simple, which is making the Thunder better, day to day, season to season, and believe it or not, decade to decade.

How do we do that? It's a lot of the stuff I've talked about now for 19 years. Internally we call these organizational fundamentals, or we might call these lessons from mountains 1 and 2, and they're pretty simple, and they're going to apply this year as well.

Number one, take a beginner's mindset to every season. Can't come in predetermining how the year is going to go, who's going to play where, how we're going to play. We have to open our minds and let ourselves take ourselves wherever this team is going to take us.

Another thing would be we're pursuing progress, we're not pursuing outcomes. We've said the same things when we

were winning 23 games as we were when we were winning 68 games. We don't know how many games we're going to win this year. We're not entitled to anything.

The other thing is we are always cognizant about creating environments where learning and development and information flow, free information flow inside of our building, is happening consistently. Now, that's for our players, but it's also for our staff. That's another big focus for us as we go through this period of change.

Then the other thing is there's more than one way to win. Not being rigid or tied to one identity, one style of play. We want to be in a position where we're learning the team constantly and not comparing ourselves to past teams or the way past teams played.

Lastly and most importantly is humility, understanding that we don't have all the answers. We have a lot to learn about ourselves, about our team. We're still 19 -- starting 19 years into this thing, and we know how hard it is to win. We know how hard it is to win in Oklahoma City, and we also know how hard it is to sustain winning in any market, including Oklahoma City.

I think everybody would agree that the second mountain for us to this point has been defined by continuity, cohesion and the depth of our team. Those things have done wonders for us over the course of time. It's allowed us to layer our personnel decisions effectively. It's allowed us to create player development pathways and really stress player development and planning. It's allowed us to manage seasons. It's allowed us to scale our play style in a way that we can be extremely flexible on the fly, and those things have been really, really important to us.

But in sports, as is in life, everything is about either effecting change or adapting to change. There's three kinds of change in my experience with the NBA: There's forced change; there is chosen change; and there's organic change.

Even though we've gone through some changes here, it's going to allow us and put us in position to reimagine some things, to look at some things differently, not to see it as a self-limiting experience, but also potentially look at it as a chance to reinvest and create a new band of continuity for us going into the future.

In regards to this year's team, I really do feel that by season's end, we could have a really exceptional basketball team if we stay healthy. But we're going to be different. There's no way to avoid that because if you look over the last two years, we're losing about 10,000 minutes combined of those players. We're losing about like a quarter of our minutes played with that particular group.

I also think that the new lottery reform is going to definitely have an effect on NET ratings. It's going to be an effect on records. It's going to have an effect on player statistics.

Our ability to baseline or compare or understand or interpret kind of what we're seeing, I think that will be a little bit different this year just because of the incentives to win for all teams.

But if this team is given the appropriate amount of time to play together, learn together, grow together, I think we could have an exceptional season.

Just in closing, you've heard me say this before, but I always want to keep this front of mind. Our first 25 years will be the most important in the history of the Thunder because those years are going to define who we are and what we're capable of as an organization for generations to come.

Now, we're actually close to entering that final phase of our first quarter century, believe it or not, and it does seem far away, but someone once told me, time is relentless, and it really is. It's closer than you realize.

But about that time where we'll be celebrating our first quarter century, all of these seeds that Adam and his team are planting are going to lead to another golden era. As I said before, we want to be a central part of that story when that all comes to fruition.

But all of that's in the future. All of that's down the line. All of those things are taking place we have to shield ourselves from, keep our focus on today because that's all that we have. In chapter 19, what we're hoping for is that when people recall it, they don't think about it relative to the hard decisions that had to be made the previous summer, but for what those decisions made possible, that 19 was a year where the team took a different shape, a different form, when a new foundation was established and a new level of continuity was put in place that takes us to the Continental Coliseum and many years beyond that as well.

Because the best Thunder team of all time is out there somewhere in our future, perhaps a few years away still, but in order to meet that moment, we have to allow this current team the time to reinvest, reform and relentlessly pursue their potential together as a team.

Everybody here in this building is 100 percent ready for that challenge.

I appreciate everybody allowing me to take you through

that. That's, again, for our fans and trying to continue to help everybody see the bigger picture and what it is that our organization is a part of and striving for, and I'm happy to take any questions.

Q. You just mentioned kind of the sheer volume of minutes that may now sort of be more available and perhaps a new look to the team to some degree. I just wonder how much of the adaptability of the team over the course of time is a muscle that those guys have been able to flex, and the core might have a chance to continue to show that and bring the new guys in along with that?

SAM PRESTI: I mean, honest answer is I don't know. I think, as I said before, we're going into the season without any predetermined ways of this person will do this, this person will do that. It's never served us -- we've never really done it, honestly, over 19 years, to walk in with a fixed idea of what's going to happen because it never goes that way.

I think we have a great foundation, as I said. I think we're positioned exceptionally well. I think we're going to have to resist the urge to try to optimize things. I think optimization with a team that's in progress, that's growing, that has individuals growing, but I really think the team development, that's one thing about our team last year.

I said this at the end of the season, most disappointed about the fact that with the injuries, we never really got to see -- we saw great individual development, but the team didn't get to work on a lot of the things we were trying to get to after the Pacers series, quite frankly.

I think the team last year had another level to it. I think we could have got to another level. But I think in due time, like I said earlier, this particular group of players, if we stay healthy, if it has time together, it has a chance to be as good if not better than any of the teams we've had.

Q. You mentioned Lu, Isaiah and Wiggs. When we spoke in July you said that the decisions this summer positioned you guys financially to maintain a team of this caliber. Is that still your understanding? Kind of speak to the level of commitment from ownership that you're sensing.

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, what I would say is certainly our anticipation, it's our expectation, but I would also say I've done this long enough to know that certainly things can change. I don't want to sit here and be definitive about that. I would say it would probably be another round of conversations like were had this past summer. I'll do a lot of listening. I'll try to understand where everybody is. Then we'll know what we have to work with, and we'll attack it from there.

I would say that I think the thing we have to balance, and everybody is aware of this, is just honoring the moment and the rare and unique opportunity we have with this particular team and this particular group of guys, because what makes this group of guys so unique isn't just that they fit together on the floor and they play well together on the floor, but it's their connection with one another, which is really kind of where you get the marginal gains with this particular group.

But we'll have those conversations at the end of the season, and I'll get a better understanding of what I have to work with, and then we'll go from there.

Q. Did having Shai under contract for the foreseeable future make it easier to make these kind of decisions this summer?

SAM PRESTI: I mean, I hope not. I think, at the end of the day -- I've said this for many, many years -- to have a really great organization, you have to have mutual commitment. You have to have commitment from your players, your best players, and you have to have a commitment from your organization to those best players.

I think if you're starting to look at things like, well, this person is committed for this long or this person makes this type of money, I think it can become transactional. I think that's certainly not where you want to be.

The litmus test I've always tried to use with people is if -- and we've had some great players over the years. If this person was a free agent, would we be doing things this way? I think it's a good mental model for getting yourself down to what the shared values are because at the end of the day, trust is cumulative. It's built up over time. And I think trust compounds too.

Once you get yourself to a situation where you're taking advantage of time you may think you have or not, I think it ends up becoming a bigger problem for you. We have never looked at it that way.

Q. Just to follow up on Justin's question as far as the savings generated from the summer going toward future teams, I know you're not going to give us specifics about Kasen's extension, but would that fall under that, being able to extend a young player like Kasen?

SAM PRESTI: Sure. I don't want to speak to, like I said, definitively about those things. I would just say Kasen is

someone we think very highly of and has done a great job for us.

I think the greatest sign of respect we could have shown Kasen is moving Lu in that trade. We potentially could have looked at a series of other options, but it's a bit of a gesture to him to say, We think you can have a great role on this team. We believe in you as a player. And we're hopeful that all that can work out.

But I never like talking specifics about that type of stuff. I just don't think it's appropriate.

Q. Even aside from a transactional standpoint, just from a personal level, you've been around Lu, Isaiah, Aaron for a long time. To have to do things that maybe you wouldn't otherwise do in an ideal situation, to part with guys that you've spent so much time with over the years?

SAM PRESTI: It's an interesting question. I think it's okay -- again, this might be maybe breaking the code for people in my position, but I think it's okay to feel disappointment when those things happen because as long as you can separate the professional from the personal, I welcome the personal part of that because those guys, in my opinion, were such great -- they're such great Thunder players because they're underdogs.

Lu was undrafted. Wiggs was the 55th pick. I think we got that pick from trading Kelly Oubre during the COVID shortened-transaction window. And Isaiah had been cut, and we were getting him off waivers essentially. To work themselves into those types of players shows a lot about them.

But yeah, it's certainly disappointing but also necessary for us to transition, as I said before, and hopefully create another foundation that can take us into the Continental Coliseum and hopefully beyond that because the team is positioned very well to do that.

Q. How would you describe the kind of dynamic and communication that you have with SGA as you're going through the process of making difficult roster decisions this summer?

SAM PRESTI: You know, we talk -- I wouldn't say regularly, but we have a good dialogue. So not every -- not every conversation is about something weighty. But I never want to put him in a position where he is having to weigh in one way or the other in a way that could affect one of his teammates.

But I always want to know what he thinks. I've done that with a lot of players over the years. I think he's got a great perspective on things. And Shai is just -- he's such a unique person, and I just can't stress that enough. That's one of the reasons why I feel so confident in him and the team, and those conversations are professional.

I think with your best players, the best players are problem solvers and not guys that fan flames. To me, my experience even just watching the NBA, those guys, those franchise guys that are problem solvers and they're not fanning the flames, they're incredibly valuable because of that. Not only are they your best players and they're a huge influence on your culture, but I think that's a big part of it.

Q. One more on him real quick. What made you believe so strongly in him as your guy to build a franchise around him when you first signed him to his first extension before there was any kind of success to speak of, with him as your star?

SAM PRESTI: Gosh, that's a long time ago. I don't know. I think obviously he had a blend of talent and skills that were very unique because I think what makes great players is idiosyncrasies, not -- I think there's a floor that you are to get to, but ultimately having been around some of these great Hall of Fame-level players, they're idiosyncratic in their own way, and I say that with a complimentary tone.

There's something that separates them from the others that makes them uniquely different. I think Shai has some of that, but he has the baseline stuff of his work ethic, his discipline, his character, things that you have to have to be consistent elite performer in the NBA or anywhere.

But his emotional awareness and regulation is superior, in my opinion. It's extraordinary. His view is layered. It's not a -- he doesn't live in a pass/fail world, and I think that's part of what's allowed him to come kind of from the back of the pack as a lightly recruited college player to this ascent. I really think that's helped him navigate that.

He's still going. He's got a lot more levels to go, and his mindset, I think, is the No. 1 thing that drives all that.

Q. You guys have done a really good job of developing at a high level, and with the allotment of minutes that should be available this year, that plus contending typically don't coexist at that high of a level. I'm wondering what your viewpoint of that is and from the guys that don't have that kind of experience that presumably will get the minutes?

SAM PRESTI: It's funny you're saying that because I think

back to when we were playing consistently 10 players, 11 players five years ago, and once the team started to get better, everyone assumed that we were going to cut down to eight or nine.

I remember being in these conversations and trying to explain, no, that's part of the reason why we think we have a chance to be very good is because we are playing more players and have a rotation that we're willing to change and it's more adaptable and more flexible.

I still think we see it the same way. We kind of play everybody. We put people in uncomfortable positions by design. We think that's a big part of development, not just individual development but developing the team so that people are accustomed to playing with different lineups at different times.

We might lose a little ground at different points during the regular season, but we think long-term it probably benefits us.

I do think there's -- I said 10,000 minutes. That's a lot of minutes. But keep in mind, we also had a lot of guys that probably could have been playing more that are now -- whether it's Mitchell, McCain, we talked about Kasen a little bit, and we're bringing Dub back.

Part of the reason some of those minutes were as high as they were I think is also because we've never really played with a full team. I think last year we had a rotation for the championship team for eight games.

If we're healthy, I think the minutes will figure themselves out, and then we have some of the new guys, and we have to kind of get a baseline on them and see ultimately what track they're on and how we can help them get acclimated.

Q. I don't know if you used this word, but you talked about the runway, the long runway for contention, the second apron and all the ramifications. Is that a case of -- how much have you had to adjust your plan as that's come into fruition? And how much is it just the fact that everybody is affected by it so it's not an insurmountable hurdle?

SAM PRESTI: I think the way I look at that is when people talk about the aprons, everybody is talking about it from a very small point of view because it affects everybody differently based on your starting point and the timeline of your team.

We have a tendency in this world to paint everything with a broad brush or prescribe something based on one person's symptoms. It's like, everyone has got a different experience with these aprons. So I don't think it can be a broad brush.

For us, the ghost in the machine is the finances, not so much the aprons. I've said that for three years probably. And sure, it's a changing dynamic, but in 2012, they introduced the Rose Rule and the repeater tax, and that was a disruption. It took time for people to accommodate and acclimate to that.

It's always going to change. You have to kind of figure it out and adapt to it. But I wouldn't paint it with a broad brush for everybody, like everyone is affected the same way. I don't believe that at all.

Q. The 3-2-1 Lottery rule has come with a lot of discussion about some of the team-building aspects, but earlier you were mentioning some of the on-court impacts. I was wondering if you could go further on some of your thoughts there on how that rule could actually impact the game itself.

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, I think, again, going back to what I was saying in the open, competition is changing as much as all these other things in the industry, and I think that these types of changes will have a big effect long-term on the product of the league in a positive way.

Putting aside the solution of the way we're going to do the draft and stuff like that for a second, because I think that's a whole different story, but when we look at it, we think that we're going to see NET ratings and records that are more similar to the '80s, not because of style of play or anything like that, but the bottom of the league is going to be significantly stronger.

I don't know that you're going to see teams with the NET ratings that you've seen in the past or even some of the records. I think it's also going to stress rotations because games are going to go longer from a competitive standpoint.

There will be a lot to learn from this. I do think it will have a lot of second-order effects. Not saying any of them are negative, but I think it'll be a bit of a calibration. But I do think the numbers are going to come down, and that's a positive thing because we're getting everybody incentivized in the right direction.

And the next order of business will be to make sure the teams that are giving their best and are trying their hardest but still can't win, because it's very hard to win in the NBA, access somehow a fair access that's not completely random to the best players in the draft. That's the next order of business.

But I couldn't be more excited about the season. I think it's going to be highly competitive.

But I don't know that we're going to be seeing 10 NET rating teams all over the place.

Q. In June you mentioned that you guys had a master plan for the facility that was put on hold. I was curious if there's any update on that.

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, we're in the same place on that. All of our focus, all of our financial focus, I should say, is directed toward the team right now, the roster, the team, these particular guys, as I said before, giving them the opportunity to pursue their potential and hopefully get us into the Continental Coliseum and beyond with what we think is a team that's positioned to be contending for quite a while.

As far as the facility itself, I don't think we're in a competitive disadvantage in this building. With this particular era of the team, I do think when the third mountain is in sight, hopefully not anytime soon, but when that is in sight, we do probably need to position ourselves to have some facilities that will give us a competitive -- I don't know if it'll be an advantage at that point in time, but keep us in a competitive state because the way teams are built, in my opinion -- I don't want to speak for anybody else, but I think the way teams need to be built here in Oklahoma City, you'll need the best development tools.

Things have changed so rapidly with science, with artificial intelligence, with medicine, and all different types of developmental techniques to improve your players and your teams. I think that's going to be an important foundation for future third mountain teams when we get there. But right now we have to focus on the present.

Q. You mentioned Jalen coming back from the hamstring. Curious on a more personal level, what do you remember about how he navigated through the ups and downs of that last year? And then on a maybe more nuts-and-bolts standpoint, because there are so many analytics out there, even as it relates to health and wellness, are there things that you look at with him to try to avoid that? Obviously I know it would probably apply to all your guys, but more of the science of it all trying to put that in the past.

SAM PRESTI: The first part of your question, he works so hard already. I remember seeing him -- I think I might have mentioned this in the spring, but I have always kind of stuck in my mind, in Phoenix, while we were playing in the postseason, the team had just left the locker room to go out to play. I can't remember what game it is. I'm the worst at that. I can't remember really anything.

But he was in the training room rehabbing, and it was just him and the trainer, and he didn't know I was watching. Just one of these quiet moments. The stuff that really matters, in my opinion, when it's all said and done is all the stuff that is in between the notes, so to speak.

He was just doing these simple exercises and just, like, so focused on doing it, and the team was out there getting ready to compete. He had had this up-and-down year as a result of it, and I just remember thinking, if we can get him back, A, what a great story because he will have gone through so many things; and then B, he really changes our team so drastically. We talk all the time about the compounding nature of personnel and how it affects the other players and what it opens up in your team.

I don't know if there's a guy that has a bigger influence on the different roles other people play and how those roles change when he's out there because he's so versatile and so impactful.

So I remember thinking about that. He's worked extremely hard.

The second part of your question, yeah, we're in the deep of trying to sort out all of these different techniques and data and analytics. At the same time, you can't get completely swept under to the point where you have so much information. But I don't want to get into the details specifically, but we feel like we've found every possible advantage in this area.

What we're hopeful of is that we really just needed a full off-season to play, to get back. He looks fantastic. He looks great. He's playing great. We're looking forward to him being himself again.

Q. Brent Venables and the OU football team before the season made it a point to visit the Memorial Museum. We talked to Kari Watkins, who does a great job with the museum, who talked a little bit about that, but she started to reiterate the Thunder's intent to every single player that comes, comes -- I know you've talked about it a ton of times, but it doesn't really get old. Could you talk about you guys influencing other coaches, other players and your commitment to the Oklahoma City Memorial?

SAM PRESTI: Sure. I mean, I don't know -- it's certainly not an outward influence. We're not telling people. But a lot of other NBA teams have come through and toured the Memorial. Other people associated with the league. Also

fans from other teams, people that come from all over the world to see the Thunder play, and they go over there as part of their experience, which I think is a great thing. And as you said, Kari does an unbelievable job.

I think things have moved in an even bigger direction recently with just the way Hartenstein has become involved. That was through his own -- that was his own endeavor after touring. That was pretty meaningful, I think, to everybody at the Memorial and everyone that's been affected.

As I said, with Russell being the featured honoree at the Day One Luncheon on November 2, now you're seeing some of these things really kind of come full circle in a way that we haven't seen to this point. But it's great for other people to feel compelled to go. It keeps the story alive and moving and developing.

The most important thing is we've got to make sure that the youth of our community and our state is really exposed to this story and all of the values that have come from that particular experience, as painful as many of them are. The story of resilience and growth and togetherness and the standard and things of that nature I think is very powerful for our young people. And going out of our way to introduce them to that, expose them to that is going to be important for future generations when many of us are not around here.

Q. At the end of the Playoffs, we had a big discussion about Chet. What do you think he learned from that experience, and how did his off-season go?

SAM PRESTI: Well, I'm going to go back to kind of what I said at the end of last season. Chet needs no motivation. Like, of everybody, this is a person that is an ultra competitor, and you don't see that just in on-court, but his preparation, his planning, his mindset for those things is elite.

You don't have a season like the one he had last year where he's second in Defensive Player of the Year voting, he's a first-time All-Star, he's an All-NBA player, he's anchoring the best defense in the league, and that was coming off winning the championship.

So it didn't need, like, any type of on-court motivation. He didn't play his best basketball in the series, but as I pointed out at that time, all the great players in NBA history, that's what makes them great. They encounter these moments, they confront them, and they battle and they learn from those and get better.

I'm pretty confident that's kind of the trajectory he's going to take. But sure, there's things he's focused on and he's worked on.

I don't think it's a matter of responding necessarily to that one series. I think he's just an intrinsically driven guy who's going to get better, as I said. There's a series of players on our team that are probably three or four years from really being at peak level, a majority of the team, quite frankly, which is kind of one of the ways I was trying to answer Barry's question. It's kind of different for everybody, with team planning and aprons and things of that nature.

We have three guys, two of which are not even in their prime, that are All-NBA players, and also the other guy that's a back-to-back MVP, and he's only getting better as well in his prime. Chet is going to get better for many, many years from here.

Q. The aprons have been a really polarizing topic. What's your thoughts on the aprons?

SAM PRESTI: Kind of what Barry is saying, I think it is polarizing because the people that talk about it all have a point of view as to how they're experiencing it. So I think that's the first thing.

I would look at it this way also. Probably shouldn't mention it this way. What were they intended to do? That's the baseline question; what were they intended to do. They were, as I understand it, put into place to even the playing field amongst teams that have an outsized financial advantage in comparison to the majority of the league. That was the first order of business.

We had a 3-to-1 spending ratio. The teams that were in the 3 could stay in the 3 for 10 to 15 years. The other way to look at this is the aprons are intended to make it so a team's primary team-building philosophy can't be spending. Another point.

Then if you look at when the rules were put in place, they didn't come in all at one time. They were phased in. So what were the things that happened right before the door shut behind everybody?

Well, teams in the luxury tax traded for big-name players. Boston was in the tax; they traded for Holiday. Phoenix was in the tax; they traded for Beal and Durant. Clippers traded for Harden. Dallas was in the tax; they traded for Kyrie Irving. Milwaukee was in the tax, and they traded for Lillard. None of those trades could be computed today.

The aprons are intended so if you are a high-spending team, you're not in a position to add more talent.

Now, what are they not designed to do? Well, they're not designed to tell a team that may feel in any market that they have a very unique moment in their organizational history to pursue excellence, to say, hey, we might be here for 50 years, maybe more; this five years in the luxury tax may be something we want to be aggressive about because we don't know how many more teams like this we're going to have in said market, wherever that is. This could be anywhere.

So the choice is there for the teams to make an educated decision about what they want to pursue or what their tolerance level is for different things.

The key, though, is everyone has that opportunity, but teams that could do that for 15 years, that's not possible anymore. So it's kind of giving everybody the same opportunity to make a choice to push in and spend aggressively if they feel they have a team that warrants that. But not everyone can do that, put choice is there.

The aprons are so that once you're at that level, you can't add more talent, and I think that's all getting mixed up with the way people present it. That's the most succinct and simple way I can answer that.

Q. You mentioned not wanting to be super rigid and allowing the team to evolve. Chet's rookie year, he plays full-time five. You guys bring in Hart, he sort of splits time there. Last year, most minutes he's ever played at the 4 he makes his first All-Star team, All-NBA team, like you mentioned. As you guys bring in a guy like Mara and bring back Sorber, is one of the goals to continue to have Chet move towards playing more full time at the 4?

SAM PRESTI: You know, it's funny how you said that. I don't have the answer to that. I don't know. We have to kind of see how things shape up and how the team fits together, all those things. That's one of the things that I'm excited about with this team.

What I like is that we have options. We have experimented with him at 5. We know that's very good for us. Him at 4, who else can we pair him with. We've played without a 5 at different times.

But I like the fact that, look, would we have loved to have maintained the team from last year and seen what it could do with a healthy year? Of course. Like I said, I don't think anybody would say they wouldn't like to have that particular group, of course.

But as I said, it's about you're either effecting change or you're adapting to change. So we're looking at that and saying, okay, this could be an opportunity to kind of reform ourselves, hopefully give ourselves a new foundation to take us into the new arena and beyond.

And I'm excited to see what Jared McCain is going to do for us. I mean, he's up there with some of the best workers we've had, not just the amount but the quality of the work.

Ajay Mitchell, he's ready to take another jump with more opportunity. Then the guys you mentioned, Mara, Sorber, Topic, Stirtz. Those guys are going to have to figure out and we're going to have to figure out how to get them positioned to have an influence on the team in some form or fashion because we really do need everybody.

Then I think K-Rich is another guy that we're really fortunate to have back because he gives us some physicality, he has some corporate knowledge, he can play many different positions for us.

How that's all going to fit together, how it affects Chet specifically, I really don't know the answer to. And I think we have to give ourselves time. We're not going to get the answers as fast as we want them. We have to give ourselves time to figure out the best way to position this team because the three guys you mentioned, they played a lot. They were big influences on things. We're going to have to kind of learn a new way, which is healthy.

Q. We saw players expand their personal brands this summer through business, obviously youth camps, community involvement. How important is it organizationally for you guys to promote these players building their brands off the court?

SAM PRESTI: I mean, I think it's important in that you want to partner with them on things that are important to them. Not everybody has the same goals or ambitions. But that's part of shared responsibility, shared partnership on these things.

Obviously it helps them -- it helps us if they feel supported, and also, they're doing a great job in the community or in any area, even in their own personal endeavors. We try to wrap all that together. It's certainly different because it used to be because of the role of social media, and not in a negative way, but you have to learn along with everybody else and try to figure out where you can add value.

But yeah, we're happy to do that, and it's a big part of our players' lives. We're fortunate it never gets in the way with this particular group of guys as to what their No. 1 focus is when they walk in this building.

I think that's what makes them so special is they have

these two different worlds they can live in and still be elite professionals.

Q. I guess with players getting more into their personal business brand earlier in their careers versus 20 years ago when it was more like end career, post-career type of thing, how much are you seeing these players mature as far as a team environment goes or organizational environment goes when it comes to just knowing business etiquette at 21, 22 years old?

SAM PRESTI: That's a great question. I think the guys are coming into the league with a much more well-rounded view of kind of their career. I wouldn't just put it in the business bucket, but nutrition, recovery, the value of sleep. These things are -- these used to be real struggles. But there's so much information out there.

Sometimes there can be too much. You have somebody come in and they're like, can I get this -- they want to try some whacky thing on Instagram that is like, nope, you don't do that, it hasn't been run through anybody yet and it's just some guy's idea.

So you've got to have a good filter on that. But I think the guys are coming in so much more well-prepared in a positive way. I think you're seeing that on the floor. Not to link everything back to what I said earlier about the history, but that's part of why I think the league is moving is such a positive direction.

And around that time it will be our 25th anniversary, a lot of these things are going to happen at the same time, it'll all coalesce, but the most important thing is do you have the players to amplify all the business infrastructure that's being built.

I really think the league does. Just everything is moving in the right direction. But at the end of the day, you have to have great players. You have to have great teams. That's really important.

Q. You mentioned Topic. I wanted to ask how he's doing, and how do you and your staff kind of calibrate what progress looks like for him, given the severity of some of the health issues he's had to overcome recently?

SAM PRESTI: Yeah. I mean, he's had a difficult road. There's just no other way to look at that. He's been unbelievable with the way he's handled those things at his age.

It's a tricky dynamic because he entered -- couldn't play the first year, obviously, because of the knee injury, which we all kind of knew coming in, and obviously he had the challenge with his cancer diagnosis. Then over the summer he had this back issue that had come up, and he missed Summer League as a result of it.

He's going to be limited in camp, partly because -- and this is a little bit of the case with Thomas Sorber as well. Because they've missed so much time with another injury, when they're coming back from a new thing -- in this case it's a back, Sorber had the scope in July to the same knee, but that's compounding on the fact that they both missed time in their draft year.

It's a much more complicated return-to-play program because it's not just from one injury, it's a big layoff where there hasn't been a lot of live play. So we're trying to figure out how to do that because it's almost like two years in both cases.

Jenny asked me the question about Jalen. It's like, so much of the information and the planning for whether it's rehabilitation or player development, it's really -- you've got to have the right people in the room to sort these things out.

It's not quite the same -- even as I remember it years ago, where we're not -- we have ankle sprains and we have muscle strains and we have bumps and bruises, but plotting these return to plays for guys that have missed that much time is really, really delicate.

Both of those guys will be limited in camp because we're trying to make sure that we're not just accounting for their recent return to play but also the previous issues they had both had.

But Top is awesome. He looks great. Excited to see him back on the floor for us.

Q. Expansion, reportedly the NBA wants to have it in '28, '29. I'm wondering if you think that things that you do now -- will it impact the things you do now for the future?

SAM PRESTI: I mean, it's going to have an influence on the league if it happens, and that's really up to the owners, and it's up to the commissioner as to whether or not they move forward with that.

But anytime you bring two new teams into a league, it will have an influence. As I said before, just the competition changes. There's things like expansion draft, what those rules will look like.

But it's a sign of growth, and especially I don't know many leagues that when they choose to expand, if they feel it's necessary, can add cities of this caliber to their stable of teams, which I think is kind of a part about this opportunity that is pretty remarkable for Adam and the team of people he has working on these things.

But we don't know if that's going to happen. That's all in the hands of ownership and the league office. But yeah, it's going to change things. But we'll have to figure out how to work through all that.

Q. You brought up Jared McCain. Having him in camp, what does that do for him and for the team?

SAM PRESTI: I think that's going to be a big difference for us. We're always really careful about making additions in season, and there is a very small collection of people -- I mean really small -- that I would have done that with at the trade deadline. He was one of them.

He had the emotional intelligence, in my opinion, to walk into our environment and navigate that but also still play with confidence. I think that's a really unique thing.

Again, those are things you just -- those are the rarities, I think, of high performers.

One of the most underrated aspects of a player in the modern NBA, in my opinion, is their self-awareness as a player, not just as a person. But a self-aware player is essential to a mid-season acquisition or really any acquisition of a team that's been together for a while. Jared has that in an overflowing amount.

I think starting with everybody at a baseline, in training camp like this, is going to do him well because there's a lot more to him as a player than a guy that can come off and rip off a bunch of threes.

I've watched him for a very long time, and he's a winning player, and he understands the things that drive winning, and intangibly non-statistically. I think he's a more balanced player than we got to see because he was trying to fit in with the current group.

Now, as I said before, there's a lot of discovery to be done, so we'll just have to see what he looks like with this constellation of players. But he's absolutely improved, as have other guys on our team, Wallace and Mitchell and all down the line. All these guys have gotten better because they're in their formative years as players.

But I'm excited to see what he does with this particular group, and especially he's never really played that much with Dub.

As I said, Dub is the force multiplier to me on our team. So that changes a lot of -- the way a lot of other players kind of look and what they have to do.

Q. You touched earlier on Ajay and feeling like there's another level he can go to. What do you envision that is?

SAM PRESTI: Well, I think there's more than one. I think he's a work in progress. He, like a lot of other guys on our team, we lost him for a majority of his rookie year and then certainly a crucial period of time in the Playoffs last year and even a big portion of the regular season.

I think he has less game experience than he has NBA experience, if that makes sense. So every opportunity he has to play he's going to improve and get better.

I mean, I just think he has the potential to be a really solid defender, in addition to being dynamic offensive player. He's gotten much stronger, and that will allow him to be more physical, more durable. I think he's an underrated passer. He can play with anybody. That's the thing I like about him a lot.

When I was watching him on film during college early in the year, that was a theme that jumped out to me. He can play anywhere. He can play with the ball. He can play without the ball. He's just a very useful player, and he's driven by winning. So those are really great ingredients to start with and I think will continue his trajectory.

Q. I saw you waiting for Russ in front of the visitors' locker room after the game. I know you have a strong bond with him. I just want to know, how did you know that news? Did he say anything to you before --

SAM PRESTI: That's such a funny question.

Q. Can you tell us what your reaction was to --

SAM PRESTI: Well, I was in Italy with my family, because I took my family to Italy this summer for a vacation, and that's to explore kind of some ancestry stuff because that's where my father's side of the family is from, and it was the night before we were coming home.

We were just in a van coming back from something my wife had scheduled for us. And I don't have social media, so Matt is the king of the screenshot. So I get all my news -- he sends me screenshots of things. So I got a screenshot with it, and I just -- I think I got real quiet, to be honest with you, because it hit me pretty hard. I just wasn't

expecting that.

And then about an hour later, he called me. We had a great conversation. I guess it makes you feel old because I remember sitting with him. His first workout with us, he got injured halfway through. George Hill was there. He was in that workout, I'm pretty sure.

So he went back, he couldn't finish the workout. We didn't tell the agent that we really were thinking about him at the fourth pick. So it was a big deal. Kept trying to get him to come back to work out. They wouldn't bring him back because they're like, we've got to do the back -- they thought he was going to go much further back.

So we just kept trying and trying and trying to get him back. Eventually it was like, well, he's going to go to New York. I ended up flying out with Troy Weaver, who was influential in this entire thing, to Beverly Hills to watch Russell work out in a gym.

But I was really there to talk to him. I really didn't need to see the workout. I just needed to get in front of him and try to look in his eyes and see if he could handle what would come if we picked him fourth because it would be an avalanche of criticism, and we knew that.

I kind of walked him through that, and he convinced me. He was underselling himself that he could handle it. But you think about, that was the first time you connect with someone -- we interviewed him in Orlando in a hotel room, but it was so amazing to look at this guy who was 19 years old, or maybe he was younger, 18, and then he came by during the spring sometime before the draft, came by my house. He was in town for one of the many things he was doing. And we had a great conversation there.

And then I'm thinking about the guy is retiring. This is such a full-circle moment for such an influential player and person.

I'm just happy for him. He's going to do so well in everything he does from here because all of his great qualities translate into life after basketball.

I'm excited to see where he ends up and what he does.

Q. You were talking about Shai's attributes earlier. I wanted to ask about his pregame kind of autograph routine and what you make of that, and what do you think it says about him that even at his kind of stature that that still is as important to him as it is?

SAM PRESTI: You know, I'm sure he's talked a lot about it before. I haven't heard his point of view on it, but I can give you my perspective. It doesn't surprise me because he is a very disciplined person and a very process-oriented guy, and that's part of his process. That's part of his discipline, to not take nights off, so to speak, or be very whimsical about where he puts his energy.

I also think he is very grounded and understands the influence that that interaction can have on a young person. I also think it's a special thing for our community that a kid, if they get a ticket, which you can get here, the way the arena is designed, the way the ushers are, we're going to keep it safe for the players, but you're going to get pretty close.

When I was growing up in Boston when they were playing in the old Boston Garden, I thought Dennis Johnson and Larry Bird slept in the Boston Garden. The idea that I could ever see them anywhere other than there would never have crossed my mind. But in Oklahoma City, that's a great thing about our arena.

When we go into the new arena, we're going to incorporate more things like that; that, as I said in the opening, as we're trying to do all these important things for a league and innovate and aggressively build the industry, the soul of the game is the most important thing. Those interactions, designing an arena -- so yes, you can increase your revenue. You can charge more for different things. But also you can give access and bring people closer to the humanity of the players and create those types of experiences. I think that's pretty important in our day and age.

As we go forward with everything as a league, I think the people that came before us did a great job of that. We do have to grow the pie. We do have to do those things. But you can't lose the soul of the game. You can't lose the humanity of the game. Even right down to watching the game in full, really, really understanding the game and the nuance of the game.

That's why I think some of the broadcast partners that have come on have done such a great job on educating people on not just the box score stats but building an appreciation for young people as to what's generating that and why and the values of the game, so to speak, like Bill Bradley talks about.

We've got to keep that stuff pretty central. We can't lose sight of that as we're endeavoring on all these other things which are necessary to get us to another level.

I think Adam is hitting on all cylinders right now with that stuff, and it's impressive. But we've got to do our part here by making sure we continue to provide access for those

types of things and keep the players safe, because that's important.

Q. I've got a baseball one for you. You guys often get comped to the Brewers and the Rays, small-market teams who are well run. They're like two of the lowest payrolls in baseball. I know you're a baseball guy at heart. They both ran away with their divisions. I know it's a completely different structure, but any thoughts on what other small-market teams are doing?

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, we follow other teams. I know some of the people at those teams. I'm always rooting for them. Everybody has a different hand to play in every sport.

As I've used this analogy before, the NBA is a poker game. It's not a chess game where everybody starts with the same pieces at the same time. It's all about the hand you have to work with, and everybody has strengths to their hand and everybody has limitations to their hand.

I think the key is figuring out what you do well and what you have access to and leaning into that and owning that. I think both of those organizations have been on the front end of a lot of different things; namely, like a lot of the technology with player development relative to what the Rays have done. And a lot of their limitations have led to advancements in their game, in their sport because they had to figure out different ways to do things.

We've talked about that for years here. I think the expanded rotations and things like that that we were doing five years ago, playing people out of position, we're just trying to learn as much as we can as we're competing so we can get better and lean into some of our advantages.

As I was answering those questions about the apron, I think the other thing in our league that we're also recognizing, and I think people in the league are recognizing, in the age of parity, which is kind of where we're at, it's understanding the moment in time that you have with your organization, over your organizational lifecycle, and really thinking through the trade-offs and the opportunities.

I think those teams are doing the same thing.

Q. What's the process of figuring out that final roster spot and kind of the benefits of prep, taking that decision with you into the season?

SAM PRESTI: We're always going to be open-minded looking at it. We'll try to look at as many different possibilities of how to create value out of that roster spot, and we'll just be -- we'll try to be creative as much as we can.

I think there's also a financial component to that, how much that will cost us, and that factors into the other conversations that Justin asked about.

It's funny, though, because I was saying this to someone the other day, when I first started doing this, even for a few years after that, I'd say probably up until the last five years, those type of questions would have been like the first question I would have got, right?

The things that we'd be talking about on the other side of the wall over there, I wouldn't have admitted it at the time, but 80 percent of what you guys were talking about would have been what we were talking about, would have been we probably need some shooting, probably need a backup this or a backup that. We'd all be kind of seeing the same thing. We'd all be talking about the same thing.

I hate to say it, but about 10 percent of what you guys are talking about relative to what you're focused on is what we're talking about. The sport has moved into a different place to the point where almost all the questions that we've talked about today have to do with economics, aprons, all the expansion.

I'm not saying that in a negative way. It just shows you how far the league has come. And it's because of some decisions that Larry O'Brien told David Stern at the time: Hey, we need to figure this out. You've got to get a solution to this issue; otherwise, Cleveland and Indiana are going to go out of business, literally.

Then small, small decisions that were made, even -- I was talking to Rick Welts about this at the Board of Governors meeting. He basically came up with All-Star Weekend. He's a genius marketer and business mind, and he had the grand idea of, instead of the game, what if we brought the Dunk Contest back in 1984, and it -- all the licensing and all the things from that point on, talking about the sponsors, that just jumped up a lot from that decision. Then they, Let's do a 3-Point Contest. They tested it in the CBA, and then they unveiled it I think it was in Dallas the first year in 1986.

It all leads to these things now where the business is a little bit more complex. But at the end of the day, we can't lose what's most important, which is what's happening on the court, what are you doing with the 15th roster spot, why did you pick this guy, that was a mistake, why did you do this. That's part of the back-and-forth that sports is.

As long as we're fighting for the soul of the game and the game itself and the progress for innovation which is

necessary to keep things moving, we are all going to be fine. You don't have to fight against the progress or the growth of the business, as long as we're protecting the humanity of the game.

Baxter asked about Shai and autographs. There's stories like that all over the place, every single day. Highlighting those are important so we don't totally get lost in some of these other things. But, hey, if I was in your seats, I'd be asking me questions about aprons and budgets and expansion and gambling and all this stuff. You have a job to do. I get it. That's a big part of the business. But watching a full NBA basketball game, that's the real deal. That's why we all have jobs.

Q. You might have answered this, but Oklahoma City is night and day from when the Thunder got here until now. Have you ever thought about that connection on -- I don't want to give the organization all the credit for the growth of the city, but have you ever thought about you guys' part in helping the city grow?

SAM PRESTI: Yeah. I mean, it certainly isn't because of us, as you said, and nobody here thinks that. The table was set for us really when the city was prepared to welcome the Hornets, and that was the most important thing.

I think the theme of the day is small decisions that were made years in advance that lead to very big culminations of opportunity, as we talked about. There were some small decisions made early on, Ron Norick being chief among those people, to lay some foundation so that when that tragedy happened in New Orleans, Oklahoma City was prepared and ready and could support an NBA team and demonstrated that this could be possible.

Now we're talking about potentially in a few years celebrating our 25th anniversary, and what happens for us in the next few years, in our first 25 years, could be remarkable, when you think about the first 25 years of a franchise post-1976 when the NBA and ABA merger took place.

We've packed a lot into the first 19, and I think we're positioned extraordinarily well for the foreseeable future, especially as we head into a new arena.

So much has happened from those small decisions.

I would also offer to say that when you speak to people here, they're always saying how much they appreciate what the team has done for the community. It's very consistent. That hasn't changed, and I think it's a very special thing. It's one of the reasons why we feel the way we do about our fans.

We have a real connection with them, and we want to make them proud. We want to work hard for them. When you have these unique and rare opportunities as an organization to pursue excellence, you want to take that seriously. You want to honor that as much as you can.

When we first arrived here, I don't know that people envisioned that this would be how things would unfold in the first 25 years, but it has. It's not a burden. It's an opportunity for us to see where we can go.

As I said in the opening, that will define a little bit about what we're capable of here. We've shown what we're capable of to this point, and now there's a challenge in front of us to see if we can continue this mountain at such a high level. It's going to take a lot of people to contribute to make that happen, but it's all in the name of representing the state and the city.

Q. Along those lines, if you ask any of the guys at any community event that they do, they all mention how they want to make sure they make themselves available. You mentioned Shai and the autograph thing. Is that something that you see growth in them? Not just the guys on the team now; look at Russ and how he's still in the community. Is that something that you see that they grow into, or is it something that you guys mention that would be nice if they did it?

SAM PRESTI: I think a lot of it starts well before they get here. I just think we've got some great players. We've got some great families around those players. People that have hugged and loved those guys early, could be mentors, could be grandparents, could be cousins or big brothers. Not everybody grows up the same way. Someone got their hand on a lot of those guys.

I think that that happens early.

Q. Over the course of this, you've talked at times about these kind of major forces that are at play with where the league is at and maybe the direction of things, and you've talked about it in historical parallel as well. You've also talked about the soul of the game and protecting that. I guess I'm curious how you feel about some of the major forces that are at play right now, maybe the direction some of them are headed, as well as the soul of the game, if you feel like it's being protected?

SAM PRESTI: I do. I really do. I think Adam and his group are absolutely in touch with that in terms of how to educate and celebrate the greatness of our players, the

greatness of our game, the nuances of our game, in a parallel track, which we have to build the industry, we have to build the business.

I think in order to have the type of golden era we had in the early '90s, decisions had to be made early. There was a lot of them, and they grew in parallel. We had these great players, a great draft class that I illustrated in '84. All these different small things came together.

I really do think we're in a great position as a business and as a sport. Not perfect, have things to clean up, but I think everyone is operating to try to make it a better product for everybody.

But I do think the best is in front, and that's why I keep kind of talking about the parallel there. When a lot of these things coalesce and scale up, we want the Thunder to be a part of that story. We want the Thunder to have a seat at the table as all these things come together.

But that's up here. That's up here. The best thing we can do relative to the soul of the game, in my opinion, is try to make the team better, try to improve the organization, and that has to happen with your day-to-day stuff, not getting distracted from the primary thing and trying to keep it simple while all these other things have to happen.

But I think Adam and his people have done a great job and I think are recognizing the moment because I think the competition is going to be better and better going forward.

Q. Since Andrew isn't here, I was going to ask what books you've been reading.

SAM PRESTI: Okay. It's light. It's a little light this year. There's a book that Brian Eno wrote. It's like a diary. It's called "A Year with Swollen Appendices." I don't know why it was named that. I think he was sick at the time.

It's one that you can kind of flip through. He's a music producer. He produced all different type of people. So I found that -- he's a real creative guy. So I enjoy anything he does or anything I can listen to or read about him.

Then there's another thing I got, it's called -- I think the title is called "Lines of Sight." It's about a Cuban artist named Carmen Herrera. It's actually not about her, it's all of her work. She does these unbelievable paintings that are very symmetrical and straight lined.

And I first came in contact with one when I was in Bilbao, Spain. They have a beautiful museum there, and I was there to watch some player. I can't remember who it was. It was like the one time that I actually was in one of these countries -- I think I was working for the Spurs at the time, and I actually did something besides go to the game and catch up on sleep and write reports.

I think it was a Guggenheim Museum there maybe. I loved this painting, absolutely loved it, and have kind of followed her work and stuff like that. All her work was in the past, but just kind of learned more about it. There's a book that has all of her paintings and her description of what was happening when she was doing those.

Those would be the two things that I've been kind of flipping through and stuff like that.

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