

# Oklahoma City Thunder

## Media Conference

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

## Alex Caruso

### Press Conference



**Q. We've had a lot of questions about the guys you lost. What's that going to be like?**

ALEX CARUSO: It's going to be different. It's already different being in the building for a couple days and not seeing those guys. You know, just miss the competitiveness, the camaraderie you have with guys that you've gone to war with and won and lost big games and spent countless hours on the road with.

So it will be different. We've got some new guys to get accustomed to and integrated with, but mostly just missing the people that you spend so much time together through the course of the NBA season and multiple seasons. Just miss hanging out with those guys and getting to talk to them every day.

**Q. What's it like in the off-season? You've got guys' phone numbers. Do you call them? Or is that something you run into them when you play them, as far as contact with former players?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, we still have -- group chat is active through the summer still. We just made a new one. So like even after those guys get traded, we're still talking, and, you know, sharing opinions of stuff through the summer.

Yeah, just check in with guys through the year, see when they do stuff and ask them how they are doing or not. And if you see them working out -- we went up to Fort Worth for a couple days at the beginning of the month and worked out a little bit. I got to meet most of the new guys. Because I try my best to stay away from Summer League just because Vegas kind of sucks in the summer.

Yeah, you just check in and use that time to get away and kind of reset as much as you need to.

**Q. Speaking of kind of sucking, how do you feel about the state of Texas A&M football right now?**

ALEX CARUSO: Not in a good spot, that's for sure.

Something that I think a lot of people in this area remember kind of getting used to, as well, with the way that OU looks, which is just me deflecting, obviously, because I want to win with A&M. But there's still a lot of games left. Hopefully we can play better. That's what I'm looking forward to.

**Q. With the departures of those three guys, especially Lu, there's more opportunity for Cason. What are your expectations as he's taking the next steps in his career?**

ALEX CARUSO: I think you saw little spurts of it last year. There was a stretch where he was kind of our main ball handler, and I think he played really well. He's been asked to guard the best players for the last handful of years, and I think he's accepted that challenge.

Through the postseason last year, you can see his confidence growing. You can see his -- just his rhythm and his comfortability with the game and the speed of the game.

So I'm kind of just anticipating that to keep improving. I think he's a guy that works hard at being a good basketball player, and he's pretty fearless. He's not afraid of stepping into a larger role or continuing to just kind of be whoever he is, whatever the moment calls for. I think that's what he's going to do.

**Q. With the new players coming in and players going out, do you anticipate any changes in how you play?**

ALEX CARUSO: Fundamentally, we are still the Oklahoma City Thunder. To the root of it, I think we want to try and be the same team, we just have to fit new pieces in and figure out what that looks like.

Still have a lot of returning guys. It's not like we lost our three top scorers or something, guys that are important fundamentally to our team. But we still have got guys that are coming back that have been in the system and played how we want to play for the last two years, at least since I've been here.

I think, like I said, at the root of it and fundamentally, we want to be the same kind of team and have the same principles and play the same way.

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**Q. When you first got here, you were the only guy with a championship ring. You guys win, and you're the only one that's defended a championship before. What's the difference in approach of getting that first one and then the approach, if at all different, to trying to get back to the mountaintop of a second one?**

ALEX CARUSO: I think it's the same climb when you're referencing a mountaintop. It's the journey, and it's not any different. It doesn't have favorites. There's no -- there's no secret formula to it. You've got to play really good basketball and get to the playoffs, and then when you get to the playoffs, you've got to play your best.

And you know, you've got to make sure that you're in the right spot to take advantage of opportunities. And I think that's kind of the biggest thing. It's like it doesn't really matter, you know, what you do last year, in the summer, you know, everyone comes back and like, oh, I'm in the best shape I've ever been and I've worked so much harder than I ever worked.

It's like you've got to go play 82 games, and then you've got to make the playoffs, and then you've got to win 16 games to get there. It's going to be hard. Nobody has ever won a championship and it's been easy. I don't think there's much difference to it. It's very difficult each and every time.

**Q. The way your games and minutes have been managed the last couple of years, you've talked about it, to protect yourself in a way to be ready for the playoffs, how has that worked out for you, and do you expect a similar role this season?**

ALEX CARUSO: I can't comment on what it will be like this season just because each season kind of holds a different story and you don't really know what the NBA is going to look like three months from now. Everything changes in a three-month span, that's how I like to look at it, from beginning of the season, midseason, post-trade deadline, playoffs, off-season. Everything changes so much that it's hard to predict.

But I've always just been a guy that's -- whatever the coach wants me to do, whatever helps the team win, that's what I'm going to do.

You referenced being ready for the postseason. I think I've played pretty well in the last two postseasons, and that's been good for me and the team. But this year might be different. You can't script it. You don't know what's going to happen.

I'm kind of just, you know, just ready for whatever role I have to take. That's kind of how I've always been as a player, and that will probably be the same this year.

**Q. You mentioned fitting in new pieces. Obviously that's Mark's decision to make those calls. That's something every coach has to do. But can you speak to his creativity, adaptability, all that stuff?**

ALEX CARUSO: I think one of Mark's strengths, that he kind of holds everybody to the same standard and has the same expectations for you. If you're going to be out there, you're out there because he trusts you to get the job done.

Whether you're a first-year guy, played a decade, scored thousands of points, or never shot the ball before, if he puts you out there, it's because he believes in you and he thinks you can get the job done.

Just try to keep it as simple as that. For the guys that are on the lower end of experience, you just tell them, like, he's not going to put you in there if he doesn't believe in you or if you can't get the job done.

**Q. Do you get forced into watching "Big Brother" with your wife?**

ALEX CARUSO: We're not a big -- watch "Big Brother." She'll keep up through social media, but we don't sit down and watch it every time.

**Q. What are the initial conversations and the gelling like with Aday and Bennett so far?**

ALEX CARUSO: It's been good. I got to play a couple different live -- some pickup, some somewhat scripted offense and defensive stuff.

I think they are really skilled individuals. I think they each have a very good feel for the game. I think they both know how to play basketball and what the right play is. I think that's a skill that not everybody has at a young age. And you know, time will tell what the speed of the NBA game will be for each of them and see how fast they can adapt to that.

But as far as Bennett, high-level shooter, great feel for the game, understanding how to play.

Aday is just a monster. Obviously there's times where you think you have -- and he just grabs the ball and puts it in or shoots a floater and nobody's touching it. But his ball skills are really -- he can pass; he can dribble; has a good understanding of how people are moving off of him.

So that is, you know -- you don't see that watching them play in college because it's a different game. But getting a couple live reps playing with him, those are the things that stood out the most.

**Q. You mentioned the group chat going on even after the trades. We know what that looks like for fans. But what does it look like on the team when a trade goes down?**

ALEX CARUSO: I don't know, I mean, not much different than us wishing them the best and kind of getting -- you're excited for them to have a new opportunity. You know, I mean, that's like -- in the NBA, you never know what a trade is going to do for somebody or how it's going to affect another team. In the end, teams make trades because they both think it's going to be mutually beneficial, and I think that's what it is.

For me, I went from L.A. and I left, and it wasn't a trade, but it was a new scene. And wasn't really sure how it was going to work out. It ended up being the best three years for my career because I was able to play and explore how I could be a better player and find new ways to impact the game and grow my game.

So anytime someone goes to a new team in a trade, you're obviously sad to miss them, but you're excited for them to have opportunity.

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