

AT&T Slam Dunk

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Los Angeles, California, USA

Keshad Johnson

Press Conference



Q. It seemed like you really got a good feel for Los Angeles and the flair of being in Hollywood. What kind of thought process went into what you wanted to do tonight and just celebrating being here in L.A.?

KESHAD JOHNSON: Man, I'm just so grateful to be here. I consider this home. I'm from the West Coast, from Oakland, California. This is home to me. This is the West Coast. We've got a swag. We've got a flavor. I felt like I was at home, so when I saw everybody, saw the fans, it is like what I dreamed of.

Once you're in a dream, you control your dream, you can do anything in your dream. I felt like the fans were with me. I just did what I did, put my best foot forward, did what I could do.

Q. People talk about putting on for the city tonight. You put on for the town. Did the dance moves hit different after getting the trophy?

KESHAD JOHNSON: Absolutely, absolutely. E-40 was a part of the plan. My big bro Ethan, he made a call to E-40 and we got Unc on board and he was ready. He was ready. The love and respect that he gave me just to take time out of his day to be involved in this, I can't ask for nothing better.

I thank Unc for coming out here. He's a pioneer for the Bay Area. We're also putting on for L.A., SoCal, too, so the whole West Coast won with this one.

Q. If it wasn't E-40 coming out, who else from Oakland especially in the rap industry were you thinking about coming out for the Dunk Contest?

KESHAD JOHNSON: I know who it is. What's my favorite word?

No, we're going to go with Too \$hort. That's a pioneer for Oakland, L.A., Bay Area, everything. So could have got him involved. I would have, too.

Who knows, in the future, it's something that could happen.

Q. You talk about the fans. What do you think about the turnout today? And when you found out that Carter was running out of time, what was going through your mind?

KESHAD JOHNSON: Man, I really wanted him to finish that dunk. Me and him being the finalists, both coming from University of Arizona, I wanted him to put on a show, which he did. We both were finalists. Wanted him to flush it, too. It's all really about making a stand, making your name. We all saw what he was capable of with his first three dunks. So we all know he needed another shot at it, as well.

Q. As an undrafted player, how much does this achievement speak to your mentality? Also, what is your relationship like with Kasparas (Jakucionis)?

KESHAD JOHNSON: Yeah, Kas, that's my boy. That's my boy. Shout-out Kas. He's a perfectionist.

Just my journey getting here, I can't thank the Lord enough. I beat the odds. I beat the odds. I made it. I made it into the NBA. I dreamed of every year -- I was watching the NBA Dunk Contest. I dreamed of being out there, putting on a show for everybody. I learned from all the people that came before me, paying homage to them, and now that I'm here.

I have to have crazy faith to be here and be in this position and just glorify the name of the Lord just for having Keshad "Showtime" Johnson to be out here in the NBA Dunk Contest and coming home with the championship.

Q. Got to know you at San Diego State. That team obviously was a team that helped raise your profile in some ways, helped get you to Arizona. What's it like to almost feel like a reintroduction now on this kind of stage, being undrafted, being in the G League, people seeing you for the first time in this contest?

KESHAD JOHNSON: Yeah, like I use the term "crazy faith." Being at San Diego State, I learned how to dream big. We were a mid-major. Didn't nobody know our names



that 2022 year and we made it to the March Madness to the finals. Beat the odds, beat 00.1 percent or something like that and made it. So I know what it takes to have crazy faith. I know where having faith in the Lord can take you. It brought me here. Being undrafted, that journey don't stop. I'm not the author of my life; the Lord is and He's the greatest author ever. That's what you're all seeing.

Q. We saw Jase Richardson going for the dunk and he kind of slipped away and hit his head very hard on the court. In that moment when you see that happening, because we always see that maybe some not competing because you could probably get injured, how do you deal with that?

KESHAD JOHNSON: I mean, I knew he was good. I knew he was good. We got adrenaline going. Before the competition, before the introductions we all prayed. We all prayed. I prayed for all four of us, that we were going to come out healthy. So I knew he just fell. It happened. He just had a little slip-up, a little hiccup. But he was good.

Of course he had a hard fall. He'll feel it tomorrow, but he's a soldier.

Q. Your energy is infectious from the moment you came out with E-40 to this conference room right now, but you just mentioned a few moments ago about being a kid and growing up, watching the Slam Dunk Contest. I'm wondering, little Keshad, did he dream of a running windmill to seal the deal or did you adjust that based on the competition at the end?

KESHAD JOHNSON: I'll tell you, little Keshad, he dreamed of everything. He dreamed of everything he put his mind to. I'm sure he believed he could do it. Now, to what extent, probably wasn't this. But I'm sure I made little Keshad proud, as well, out here doing what I'm doing now.

I just knew anything was possible. Dream big. Me coming from Oakland, California, beating the odds, being less fortunate. I got love all around me. So I had to come out here and put on a show.

Q. Running windmill always in the plan?

KESHAD JOHNSON: Yeah, it was always in the plan. I had about two days' notice -- I'd say about five days' notice, but I had two G League games and two days of actual practice. Just stuck to the plan. My coach Chuck, he told me stick to the plan. I wanted to change it so bad. My blood was boiling a little bit. Stick to the plan, and look what happened.

Q. When you're designing your dunks, do you think

about innovation or about crowd reaction or difficulty?

KESHAD JOHNSON: Man, you hit on everything. Really I wanted to do whatever I was comfortable with. Go for a heavy hitter. Also kind of playing it safe or whatever the case may be. But everything. Dunking is an art. Everybody, we done seen crazy dunks. It's kind of hard to come up with new stuff each and every way, but don't nobody really dunk the same. Everybody has their own art that they're putting on to something that somebody else has probably done before.

So me, I'm just going out there and putting my own flavor into it. Just trying to be myself, trying to be contagious to everybody, trying to get the crowd involved, get the judges involved, pay homage and just show everybody who I am.

Q. Speaking of paying homage, you have the Dr. J trophy. How special is it to have legends like that to be able to present it to you and to be in this moment with what you call as your hometown?

KESHAD JOHNSON: Man, I've been watching NBA all my life. Being around all these legends. I promise you it's literally a dream. I can't put it to words. It's a dream being front and center stage with Julius Erving, Dominique Wilkins, able to shake their hands, Vince Carter teammate, list goes on and on. Just being able to show everybody who I am. I know who they are, but now they know who I am and now we can all be family.

It's going to be the next generation to come after me. They might look up to me in a sense, and I'm going to be accessible to them and pay homage to them, too.

Q. I saw you go up and embrace Vince after the contest. I was curious if he said anything to you or what that moment was like for you?

KESHAD JOHNSON: I would say the energy that Vince brought, it was also contagious to everybody. He made sure he was accessible to each one of the dunkers. I even watched him yesterday at the Rising Stars game. He was intense. He was ready. I feel like he loved being out here. He loved giving back. Him being able to embrace me, embrace the other participants.

You know when something is real, and I feel like his love, his knowledge he was trying to get to us and him being accessible to us, it was real love, and I felt that.

Q. Keshad, the entire West Coast is proud of you. What was going through your head when you were dunking, jumping over E-40? Were you telling yourself anything, any words of encouragement?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

KESHAD JOHNSON: Man, I was just thanking God through the whole time, each and every time. Just thank God.

I'm always second. Always give Him the praise, the glory first. I got that dunk done, thank God. Now we're on to the next. Now we're showing our flair, now we're showing the flavor, now we're putting on for the Bay, now we're doing our little dance. You know, we're turning up. Go back, be humble, thank God.

Q. What does this win do for your confidence for the Heat's last 26 games?

KESHAD JOHNSON: Man, I'm bringing it back. I'm bringing the trophy back. We're going to get live in the locker room. We got a taste of what a trophy is, so I'm going to bring it back to the locker room to my teammates. We're going for the big one. We're going for the big one. Hopefully this can give everybody some extra energy.

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