

Emirates NBA Cup

Friday, December 13, 2024

Oklahoma City Thunder

Jalen Williams

Semifinal Practice Day



Q. Jalen, for people who are watching the Thunder for the first time in the NBA Cup, what are you hoping to show people on maybe a little bigger stage this weekend?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think how hard we play defensively and how together we are as a team. I feel like those two things are what really separate us. Obviously we can score the ball, but on that aspect, it's pretty exciting to watch.

Q. It seems like you guys really like playing with each other, like the vibes seem high. You guys always look like you're having fun out there. In your opinion, where does that come from?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think just like the guys we drafted has been a big part of that. That's one of those like luck of the draw blessings that we have with the team. We're all young, so a lot of the guys that got drafted the year before me have only been in the NBA for like a year longer. So everybody's going through the same phases of their career for the most part.

Yeah, I think it just comes down to who we've drafted. We have a real good group of like genuine guys. Then I think we're winning, so that's usually pretty fun.

Q. Jalen, you've had a lot of different experiences. You've been to All-Star Weekend. You've done a variety of different things, alongside some of your teammates too. This is obviously a completely new and different, kind of weird experience in some ways. How have you guys in the past cut through the noise to play your best basketball? What's going to be key again here?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, like you said, just me personally, I did The Finals correspondence thing. And obviously like the Playoffs, I feel like this is kind of the same vibe, All-Star Weekend and things like that. I think we've done a good job of blocking out the noise.

Like I said, we have a team that's so involved with

ourselves and we get along so well, this doesn't really feel too new, outside the media circuit.

So it's just another game. We're going to go out there and play the way we do usually and let the chips fall where they fall. We've done a good job of just being within the team and understanding what's at stake every time we play.

Q. The top two teams defensively playing each other. Kind of unusual to be playing a third time by mid-December. What do you take from those two previous games against the Rockets? And how do the two defenses compare? Yours is No. 1, theirs is second. Are there comparisons that you would do?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think when obviously we're that close, so it's probably a matter of points between who's 1 or 2. I think both teams do a good job of being really physical and playing hard. That seems to be kind of a lost thing early in the year when everybody's trying to figure out how their team wants to play. So you have to give credit to them for how hard they play.

They scheme well, and they have a lot of talented players on their team that can defend and want to defend, which is a big one. I feel like that's kind of how we are as a team too. It's always fun playing against them because they give you a playoff feel. Just kind of like later down the line that's kind of what it's going to feel like.

It's kind of fun playing against them, and you get to learn more and more about yourself when you play good teams like this.

Q. At the age of 23, you are already one of the vets of this locker room.

JALEN WILLIAMS: You said I'm a vet?

Q. I think so, one of those. Do you remember how it started -- I'm talking about to go after the game for the interview, everybody together. Do you remember how it started or what happened, when was the first time?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think it was my sophomore year with like Summer League in Utah, Chet barked, and it kind of



was like random, like it wasn't on purpose. I think Twitter kind of got a hold of it and then -- our team's so weird, I don't even remember what happened after that. We started barking after.

Chet kind of started it by accident. I think maybe one of the interviewers talking about having a dog mentality or something, and he barked. It kind of just took off from there. I think me and J-Will started doing it, mocking him, and once Oklahoma gets wind of something like that, they usually stick with it.

Q. Do you think any time in the future will be normal interviews, or it will be forever?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I don't know, I enjoy it. I think everybody else does. We don't do it every time now, but it's kind of like our identity.

Q. I don't know if you noticed Alex's retweet yesterday, but he seemed invested in the idea that you guys might have a lack of national TV games. You guys have since been flexed into a couple in January, but I guess this showcase, like being on a broader scale, what does it mean to you guys as a team considering there might be a lack of national coverage?

JALEN WILLIAMS: It's something that we all as a team understand, like just being kind of like a small market team, it's just something that comes with it. But we also embrace it a lot. It kind of adds like a chip to our shoulders to a certain extent. We also like understand how the media and like the coverage works and stuff like that.

It's something that's kind of like out of our control. All we can do is win games and kind of make it to a point where you need to see us on TV. That's kind of how we look at it.

I don't know if AC follows me on Twitter, so I probably didn't see it.

Q. I'm just wondering, what do you make of Cody's season so far, his progress with Utah? Is there anything about your rookie season that you've particularly shared with him or just seen him maybe take some interest in?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, I thought he's done a good job handling everything that's coming to him. Obviously their team is kind of like in a phase where they're still trying to figure stuff out, so I always try to harp on that with him. You're not playing basketball for a year with this team. You're trying to have a stint of 10 to 15 years of playing.

It's hard, especially because he's 19, 20 years old. There is a little part of that where there's a little disconnect with me and him because it's like I couldn't imagine coming into the NBA at 19 and obviously playing against these guys. So that speaks to how talented he is.

I always try to remind him of that. You're extremely young. You're going to have a lot more years and opportunities to do things. A lot of this year is just getting better and staying focused. You don't want to end the year kind of like the same as you were when you started. So I try and harp on that a little bit. It's a marathon, not a race. Everybody's path is completely different.

Like my rookie year is completely different than yours, and that's what makes the experience nice.

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