

# Emirates NBA Cup

Friday, December 12, 2025

Oklahoma Thunder

Jalen Williams

Semifinal Practice Day



**Q. I don't know if you are superstitious or not, but you are using the same locker room that was used by the Bucks last year and the Lakers two years ago. That mean something for you, or that's just one more thing?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: Nah. Unfortunately, no. I don't have a fun answer, no. I want to give you a cool answer, but no, I'm not really superstitious in regards to that. I'm more superstitious with my routine and preparing to play a game. No, it doesn't mean anything to me.

**Q. Jalen, you guys got to the Cup Finals last year. I'm wondering what you did with your prize money?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: My financial team is going to watch this. Let's see -- I invested it. I saved it.

**Q. Is there a discussion, because obviously you're not lacking with the contract over the summer and several of your teammates are the same, but every team has younger guys where half a million dollars could mean a lot. Do you have that discussion in this locker room and is there any joking about the stars better show up so we can get paid?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: J-Will reminds us the exact dollar amount every single day of what it would be to win. So hopefully that answers your question enough.

Also, half a million dollars is a lot of money regardless if you make what I make or whatever the case may be, you know what I mean. That's enough money to get you going and play hard.

If we're going to be in the Cup, too, a lot of it for us, if we are going to apply ourselves to anything, let's do it to the best of your ability and try to win. That's just our nature. That's just how we play basketball.

**Q. What do you feel like you were able to take from this, such a unique experience, being here for this many days and all the things that you have to go through that helped you on the run last year, and maybe how do you maybe bring that into this situation**

**this season?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think the biggest thing is just, like, this right now, like doing the media scrum, I'm going to stay here hours after practice. Just that kind of stuff was what happened in the Finals. That's what happened during the playoffs. It gave us like a good gauge of what to expect. I think for me, the biggest thing is how to use my time wisely, to know when to get treatment and still stay in a routine.

So, yeah, we get to practice it, we get to utilize this. I think that was the coolest part of it. I think I did the Finals correspondence thing like three years ago now, being able to see that, then do the Cup, and then obviously go to the Finals and win was a cool kind of pathway forward just because I know what to expect.

I know what goes on during this kind of stuff, and from there we just got practice. Obviously these games hold a little higher intensity, too. So we are able to kind of like practice some of that stuff, too.

**Q. You guys obviously have so many great individual defenders, but especially in a matchup where you might be facing someone like Victor Wembanyama, how important is it to connect the defense with rotations and the help defense and that sort of stuff?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, I don't know if he is playing or not yet. I don't know if that's been announced. You say he is? Yeah. So he is one of those, he is kind of like in a class of his own. So a lot of the little fundamental stuff and being in the right spots are heightened when you play a player like that.

Another example would be probably like Giannis or some of those guys that are bigger. You really have to be on your principles; otherwise, they will have big nights. He is one of those players where you have to bring in, understand our rotations, understand what we are trying to get done defensively.

**Q. After the last game, Mark mentioned the room to improve for this team, which sounds crazy with the record and the numbers. I asked, where does the**

**ASAP** . . . when all is said, we're done.®  
sports

**improvement come from? He said individual improvement is one big emphasis, especially the age guys. You're early in your career, a lot of guys on this roster. How do you balance the emphasis and focus on individual improvement versus competing at the highest level for a team that has a chance to do some historical things?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think I start speaking about myself. I always try to have my individual improvement for something that I think the team needs every year. Obviously this year is a little different because I didn't get to have the summer I wanted to, but I always try to take something that I didn't do well last year and see how that fits the mold of what our team needs.

I know Shai has been quoted saying he does stuff like that. Shai is a little different because we go how he goes. But I think that's what everybody does. Everybody tries to figure out, what's my role and how can I individually improve that, which overall for the greater success of the team, when you do that through 15 guys, makes us better.

I think that's what makes our program really special. You get to see guys like Ous [Ousmane Dieng] who get more and more comfortable just each year that comes on, and just everybody that gets to be a star in their own role. You see Hart [Isaiah Hartenstein] gets here and he gets to do more with his production. That's just a testament to everybody to figure out what part of their game they need to add in order to make our team more successful and not so much them individually.

**Q. Two years ago, I saw you gelling with Nikola Topic right away on the draft night taking pictures.**

JALEN WILLIAMS: Was that two years ago?

**Q. Yeah, it was. Could you just talk about your shock with first his ACL and then the latest health scare, and how you went through that and how he is reacting to all of that?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, I've got a lot of respect for Top. Really good dude, and he's young. I've actually gotten out of the point, and he has been the reason why, where I'm like, oh, that sucks, because he doesn't come in like, ah, it sucks. He's still up. He is going in and working out and shooting and trying to get better, which is insane to me.

The least we can do as a team is give him something that's really comfortable when he comes in, comes in to work out. So he has been really, really strong about this situation. He doesn't feel sorry for himself.

Yeah, I mean, it's still crazy. I think everybody knows for him to be going in there working out and still going through his treatment and having torn his ACL the year before and not even get to reap the benefits yet of being able to play an NBA game just speaks to his character and how much he is willing to push through adversity.

Real proud for him, man. Hope to get him out real soon. But yeah, he's a dawg, for sure. A lot of respect for Top.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports