

# Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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## General Manager Sam Presti Head Coach Mark Daigneault Press Conference



He has had a significant impact in our organization over the last several years. He has the rare combination of youth and experience. He's coached over 250 games as a head coach, and he's done that with a lot of different adverse conditions in the G-League. He's done it with deft skill, and he's built tremendous relationships not just with our players at the G-League level, but also at the NBA level, as well as all the different people that he pulls into his processes as a head coach within the building, both at the Blue and within the Thunder.

THE MODERATOR: All right, welcome everyone today for the virtual introductory press conference for the Thunder's new Head Coach, Mark Daigneault. We have Sam Presti, our executive vice president and general manager, and Thunder Head Coach Mark Daigneault here today.

We will start with comments from Sam, followed by comments from Coach Daigneault. Following that, we will be available for questions.

With that, I would pass it on to Sam.

SAM PRESTI: Today is obviously an extremely exciting day for us. Before we get into today's announcement I do want to acknowledge that it's Veterans' Day, and take stock of the fact that there are many, many people that have sacrificed in our country to give us the privileges we have today. Very grateful for that. So I think that is important for us as an organization to recognize.

With respect to the next head coach of the Thunder, it gives me tremendous pleasure and excitement to introduce Mark Daigneault. As we have talked about and as we reposition our franchise and organization in an ever-changing and evolving NBA, we couldn't be more thrilled about the traits that Mark brings to the table for us.

A little bit about him and the reason why we feel like he's the right person at the right time. Mark joined us when he was 29 coming from a position in Florida where he was assisting the coaching staff, and assumed the head coaching position for the Blue. He had I felt like the rare traits of someone that had high potential. He's a curious learner, a diligent worker, a creative thinker, and has the utmost integrity and selflessness, which is critical to being in a leadership position as an NBA head coach.

One of the greatest skills I think he possesses is his relatability to the modern NBA player, and the modern NBA organization. As we reposition our franchise for future sustainable success, we want to remain cutting edge, forward thinking, asking tough questions of ourselves and pushing ourselves forward, and I can't think of someone better than Mark to be the person leading that charge from the coaching position and empowering all the different people he works with, which is one of the greatest strengths that he has.

As a basketball coach he's a great teacher. As I have said earlier, he's been involved with our draft processes, player development systems have come significantly further and further each year under his purview. He has had a hand in so many different things that happened behind the scenes, including staff development of a lot of different coaches that he's had with the Blue that have gone on to come the Thunder or on to different positions. That's a tremendous sign of leadership and selfless leadership. We couldn't be more excited about his acumen, his toughness, and his consistency as a coach on a day-to-day basis, but also the person that he is. So we couldn't be more thrilled to I guess re-welcome him in a different role, but to have him as part of the Thunder going forward. We couldn't be more excited to watch his growth and contributions flower from here.

I'll turn to over to Mark.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Thank you, Sam. I'm so excited and so grateful for the last six years in this organization and in this community. I'm grateful for the fact that the Thunder have raised me as a professional basketball coach and as a head coach. I can't wait to continue to grow here with these great people in this great organization. I want to thank Mr. Bennett for this



opportunity, and also for the care that he takes in this community and in this organization with the people in this organization. I want to thank Sam for always seeing me for what I can be rather than what I am. That was a word he gave me back when he hired me in 2014, and he has delivered on that with his support and guidance time and time again.

When Sam called me and offered me the job the other day I was just so overwhelmed thinking about all the people that have had their fingerprints on my life and career. I just want to take the time to thank them very quickly right now. I want to thank my wife, Ashley, who's also a coach, but is the love of my life. I can't wait to continue our live together Ash, here in OKC. I want to thank my parents, my sister, all my friends and family for their unconditional support. I want to thank all the coaches that have had an incredible impact on my career, opening career doors for me. My high school coach, Steve Debzinski(phonetic) Coach Calhoun and Coach Blaney at UConn. Ralph Willard and Billy Donovan who brought me to Florida, but has been a tremendous friend and mentor over the better part of the last decade.

The thing Billy did for me here with the Thunder is opened the door to the Thunder to our Blue staff and gave us unprecedented access to the Thunder team, and certainly those experiences put me in this position to be able to take this position on.

I want to thank the Thunder community, the Thunder organization, the people I work with every day who have helped me grow. The coolest thing about this is I've been able to grow with them. There are a lot of people in this organization that don't have a press conference today that are on a very similar trajectory to me.

To be able to grow up here with these people is inspiring and makes me really, really love coming to work every day. I've never had a bad day with the Thunder. The last thing I want to do is thank all the players that I've coached over the course of my career, especially want to shout out to the Blue guys who I coached here in this organization. Their commitment and grind is just inspiring to me, and today is a day that I want to give them the shirt off my back.

Lastly I want to thank the Thunder players. It was a pleasure working with this team last season. Inspiring group of guys that I admire for their competitiveness and who they are as people. I'm just so excited to get back to work with them here in a couple weeks. It's not going to be easy and nothing worthwhile is, but I'm just so excited and grateful to be able to plug back into this organization and be around these great people, great organization, and great players here coming up in a couple weeks.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys. Questions.

**Q. Mark, with the season being condensed or the off-season to the season being condensed with the draft and free agency coming very quickly, what are the priorities for you right now? What are some of the things to tackle first?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I reached out to all the players and was able to talk to them already. Certainly staffing is a high priority coming into this, and then just continuing the conversation. The good thing for me is that the organization has been humming all this time, and all the people that have an impact on the organization have been working all the way through. We're ready for whatever comes our way always, and December 1st is no exception to that.

And I also want to point out the fact that going into the bubble experience the players did a great job keeping themselves ready. I have 100% confidence when they come back in the doors they're going to be hungry and ready and in shape and ready to roll.

Obviously we have a lot of work to do, but I'm pretty confident because of all the people we have here.

**Q. Hey Mark, how are you?**

SAM PRESTI: I'm good. How are you?

**Q. Good. Congratulations again. Want you ask you a little bit about your background in developing players. Obviously that's such a huge part of the G-League, as an assistant with the Thunder, but I know that was a big part of what you did all the way through your college coaching days. Can you just walk you go through a little bit of what that looks like for you and how you -- I know everybody is different -- but walk us through that. That's been such a hallmark of your career.**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I don't want to over simplify it, but every player is different and every player is a person first. I always have just relied on instincts of connecting with the person first and really having an appreciation for the person.

The one thing I've learned since coming here to this organization and being in professional basketball is all of these players have a reason to admire them and not just respect them. That's a baseline for any player. But if a player has made it this far, this is what the Blue taught me -- if a player made to this far there is a reason to admire

them, and I think expressing that admiration and accepting them for who they are and then trying to help them be the best they can be, chase down the vision they have for who they are as a player, but also plug that into the larger structure of a team in an environment that elevates everybody.

So that's the big picture view, but that starts with every person. Every person is different and connecting and tapping into that.

**Q. I know you have you said before Mark that you grew up a kid of an educator. I know your mom has taught. I don't know if your dad does or not. You mentioned fingerprints on you before. To hear you talk about basically teaching and growing players that way, I have to think those fingerprints are fairly large. How would you sort of waive the importance of being a kid that grew up around the teaching profession?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I mean, my mom is an educator, so I grew up around her. She's a special educator. My sister is in education. My father is not an education but is a tremendous grinding worker. I got a lot of my commitment level from him. My wife Ashley is a coach now at OU with their gymnastics team.

And so I was put in positions to teach and coach at a very young age. I was an education major in college, and so I feel very at home in the classroom and I see the court as an extension of that.

It's really a teaching job and basketball is just the vessel through which you're teaching.

**Q. Just wanted to know, what specifically, maybe one or two things do you carry with you specifically from your interaction with Billy Donovan over the years that you can take into this job?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's hard to just isolate two. The first thing I learned about him is he's a great coach, and the next thing I learned about him is he's an even better person. That's probably what I took away from him, how he treated people and the type of man that he is.

But I would also say this: He exposed me to a great deal of great assistant coaches and staff members, many of which I've worked with here. So that's the thing that is just so humbling and so inspiring. I just have so many people like him in my life that have this that type of impact on me.

The thing that's so great about being promoted here is that a lot of them exist in this organization. I got a phone call today from a coworker Donny Strack, and he was

congratulating me. Best thing about this is we get to go to work together tomorrow. So that's what cool about this specific scenario.

**Q. Sam, you mentioned Mark being the right coach for the right time. Just wondering, how did you balance the thought of promoting from within versus hiring an outside candidate, and what are some of the reasons that you chose to promote Mark from within?**

SAM PRESTI: Well, I mean, we talked to a lot of different people, and there is an unbelievable amount of coaching talent, young coaching talent in the NBA and all over the world. But I think the thing with Mark, I don't think it's necessarily the fact that he has these experiences with us alone, but I think Jenny mentioned it in her question. I think he has a real modern approach to today's NBA. I think he's an extraordinarily quick learner. He's shown that since he took over the Blue at 29.

I do think he's very curious about how people do learn and how to present information that can help elevate the group. He's collaborative in nature in terms of he referenced his relationship with Donnie, and he sees the different people in the organization like Donnie or Matt Tumbleson, Andrew, all the different people that have a hand every day, I think he does an excellent job of empowering those people and making them feel a part of the process which is a sign, in my opinion, of true leadership. I think that elevates the building.

In terms of as we continue to reposition the organization for what I said earlier, which is evolving and really kind of a built-to-be-disrupted NBA industry. Quick learners, people that have strong values, people that connect different disciplines within the program, and then obviously relateability with your players in the modern NBA player.

I think Mark does a great job balancing accountability, but also meeting people where they are, to use his words, and understanding their motivation. That comes down to the ability to learn quickly and apply quickly and take some chances. I think that is one of the things he did well with the Blue.

We can't underestimate the level of experience that he gained at an early age. Those experiences I think will compound over time as he gets into this role, but he also has pre-existing relationships that will help people support him. I think he will also elevate the group and the building in ways that are going to be necessary as all NBA franchises enter into a new world.

**Q. If I could ask one quick follow-up to that, I know this is only relevant to the short-term. With everything**

**being so condensed, how helpful is it to have someone who has been with the organization so long?**

SAM PRESTI: I think it's helpful, but I don't think that it's an elixir in any way. I think anybody that knows us knows that we're not going to be driven by short-term restraint. We're not going to let that drive our decisions in any way, shape, or form.

We're going to do what we think is the best thing for the franchise long-term and deal with whatever disruption that may exist in the short-term in order to get the long-term benefits we want.

So to be honest with you, I think having some of these constraints early on and having a little bit of unpredictability, I think it's good for us. We do well. I think for Mark in particular, I think he'll assess those things and figure out how to use them as positives and strengths for us as he continues to chart his own path as an NBA head coach, and as an organization we'll do the same thing.

I don't think it's a negative, positive. I think it's just like if you have the right people, you've solved the problems effectively, I think we'll do that.

**Q. So in the absence of Billy in the past couple months, do you feel that you're kind of role with the team that you've been asked to do increased before the official announcement?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Not in particular. It's been pretty quiet, if I'm being honest. Our players -- usually in the off-season the focus is on our players, and they just went almost 12 straight months if I count the quarantine period before the bubble, and so they've kind of been in their own worlds and recharging, because I think they knew there was a possibility they'd be playing pretty quickly because of the circumstances.

So it has been quiet, but everybody, the whole organization, has continued to work and do good work and stay ready. I wouldn't say there was any increase.

**Q. Mark, as you prepare for this assignment, do you have any idea what your roster will look like with clearly the Thunder's entering a transitional period either now or very soon? How do you prepare for a season in which you can't be sure what your roster will look like?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, I'll kick that to Sam in a sec, but all I'll say to that Barry, is this is the modern NBA. I don't think anybody in the NBA knows what their roster will look like at a give time. There are times where the

noise is a little louder, but I really can't get concerned about that.

The job is hard enough to start engaging in hypotheticals. I'm thinking about being extremely present with the players on the team and with the players that are in a Thunder uniform, whether for years and years or whether they're on a ten-day contract. That's all I can control and all I'm really focused on.

**Q. Sam, in the time you've had two coaches the Kings have had 8; the Nets, 9; Knicks 8; Phoenix 8, on and on. Seems like you addressed it when you said this is not a short-term play. But you hire or promote Mark at 35, so I presume you're envisioning him coaching the Thunder for a good long run. You expect him to be coaching at 40 or whatever. But you seem to be more as an organization closer to the Steelers and the Mavericks and Spurs than to these teams that change coaches every 15 minutes.**

SAM PRESTI: I can't speak for them because every team is different, different circumstances. I think that a lot of that comes from, one, we've had good coaches. That's the first thing. Two, we've had good players. Those guys, players obviously make a huge difference in all of our existence. I don't think any of us would shy away from that.

But also think the leadership that Clay Bennett represents and the way he empowers people and creates a family atmosphere. You know, we see people as part of solutions and we tend to try to stick with people and let them do their best work. I do think that's part of the environment that's been created here, and a lot of that goes back to the group of people that started in 2008 together.

It was a much smaller organization, a lot of us were a lot younger, but there was some significant groundwork laid at that time, and we went through some significant adversity. We linked arms together and rode that out. We understand that a big part of our success was sticking with things and remaining optimistic about our ability to problem solve and learn and adapt.

I think we have tried to do that over time. Coaching in the NBA is an extraordinarily hard job, and I have so much respect for the guys that I've worked with, Scott and Billy, you know, that have been here in Oklahoma City. P J as well.

But I think that I've learned so much from them, and I think I'm going to learn a ton from Mark, and already have over my time observing and working with him since he's been with the organization.

I think that's what it's about more than anything, and putting people in position to be successful. But I think everybody needs support when times get tough, and we're always going to support the head coach here. That's something we've tried to do, and I expect Mark to be here for a really long time.

**Q. Congratulations, first of all.**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Thank you.

**Q. You mentioned staffing earlier. I was just curious, do you have a coaching staff in place? If so, can you tell us who they are or more specifically who's going to be retained from to the previous year's staff?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, so to answer your question, I wouldn't say anything is in place. Sam just offered the job recently, so nothing really is in place. We are in those conversations right now. I'm not going to get into anything specific about the existing staff or any external people. All I'll say is I have a ton of confidence and respect and admiration for the coaching staff that we have here and the people we have here, and I fully anticipate that the first place we look for our next coaching staff is internal.

Those conversations will be happening over the next few days. We're on it. But I don't have anything specific to report right now. I need to reach out to those guys later on today.

**Q. Mark, how would you describe your offensive philosophy?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: You know, I think the two things that we've learned in the NBA, it's kind of cliché, but there is a reason. You have to play with great pace and you have to play with great spacing. That's the way the league is right now. That's the most efficient way to play. Analytically it's the most efficient way to play and creates the most space and opportunities for not only your best players, but for all of your players.

So I would say that offensively a lot of times you're led by your personnel and the strengths of players and really just trying to find ways to put those guys in the best positions to be successful. But I would say as a foundation, the way I see the game offensively is you've got to play with great pace not only up the floor, but with cutting and timing in the half court. You got to keep the floor spaced and let the ball breathe and put those guys in positions to play to their strengths.

I think that is a pretty strong foundation to be an efficient basketball team on the offensive end of the floor.

**Q. Sam just mentioned how hard it was to coach in the NBA. So how challenging do you think it'll be taking over a team a little over a month before the season starts, and how do you think that already being on the team helps?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, the first thing I'll say is that every coaching job is tough and difficult, especially in a league like the NBA that is this competitive. So I don't think any circumstance you look at with any coach in the NBA, it's a hard job for that reason. It's challenging. I would say that the reason I feel confident -- everyone is talking about the quick turnaround time. I just interviewed with Sam and his group for a long period of time, and not once did they talk about the quick turnaround time. The whole conversation was centered around the vision for the organization, how the people will be empowered in this organization, and how will the coaching staff allow themselves to be empowered by the great people in this organization.

Those are the types of conversations, and when you're in a place where that's the dialog, it gives you a lot of confidence to be able to handle tough situations which are inevitable in the NBA. The quick turnaround or shortened season or whatever is just another -- it's the world we live manage right now, which is why I'm so grateful to be in an organization with such a strong foundation like the Thunder.

**Q. Sam, just over the variety of experiences you've seen Mark in, just in the Thunder organization, just curious what stands out to you about his ability connect with players? He had mentioned the unprecedented level of access that Billy Donovan granted the Blue staff. You've seen him work with rosters that turn over very frequently in the G-League and also as an assistant with the Thunder as well.**

SAM PRESTI: I mean, I watched that for a while. Obviously I just think the G-League is a massive incubator for learning, and I think you cannot deny that. From rules that are experimented with there to different tactics that get experimented with there, defenses you see you may never have seen before, and the players are changing constantly. It could be that few days in advance of a big game there is an assignment and a player is coming down and there is some specific things that we're looking for this player to work on.

Mark has to adapt or the coach has to adapt to integrating that into an already kind of fully-formed team setting, and that's not easy to do. It takes great relationships to be able to do that. Through our draft processes he's been -- he

leads the draft workouts and works pretty closely with the scouting group to design those workouts in a way that we can see things that we're looking to try to uncover during the workouts.

I also think it's your first introduction to a young generation of players when they're here, whoever is running those draft workouts. And then just in general just our player development systems and processes are vertical with the Blue team and the Thunder team.

Mark has been integral and collaborative with the other disciplines that play a role in a holistic and integrated development program. I've seen it on a lot of levels, but I think it comes down to relatability, being inclusive, and as I said earlier, empowering others to help him learn and how he applies that on the floor to ultimately help the players.

That's what it's all about. He's constantly looking for ways both inside of sport and outside of sport to help players get better. I think that's one of the reasons why the players that he's worked with in the G-League or the NBA have enjoyed those relationships, but also as a result of that allowed him to have challenging conversations with them.

I just think that's a very, very transferable skillset, and it's not something that you necessarily can learn. I think it's a natural gift that he's possessed since I've seen him work on the floor with players at Florida when he was 26 or 27 years old.

**Q. Just wanted to first off, have you considered the significance of becoming the first G-League coach and NBA coach in the same organization now? And you mentioned the access that Billy gave you even when you were with the Blue. How meaningful was that to make this an easy transition for you?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, that's why I mentioned it. The access was incredible, not only for me, but for the assistant coaches. It was an open-door policy.

But have I thought of the significance? I mean, certainly a lot is going through my mind, but the thing that is really, really cool is when Sam announced this to the staff this morning, the enthusiasm of all the people that I get to work with, that's the significance of it.

If you're the first anything, I mean, I'm not sure that really matters as much, but the relationships I have in this building and with these people, I think a lot of people here feel like they're a part of this, and that's how it should feel in a tight knit organization. I'm.

So proud and happy to be able to share that with

everybody. Certainly everyone in this organization, but everybody I mentioned at the beginning. That's the coolest thing about it. I get to share this with a lot of the people that have had a tremendous impact on my life and my career.

**Q. Just quick question. You mentioned talking with some players. Was one with Chris Paul?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I talked to Chris this morning. I shot most of the players a text. I didn't know who was awake and Chris was on the west coast, and he called me back and we had a short conversation. Sam and I have a busy day, but not as busy as Chris Paul. He's got a heck of a schedule that he keeps up. He's incredible.

But, yeah, we spoke this morning, and he was so congratulatory, and I'm so grateful to Chris certainly, but to all the players. This year was my first year with the Thunder in a full-year capacity, and it was my first year in a full year in the NBA, and those guys just gave me so much confidence.

They wrapped their arms around me and the conversations I've had so far today I felt that from them, and I want to give that back to them through our coaching staff and the organization. So excited to get back to work with not only Chris but with everybody.

**Q. So Mark, being a self-proclaimed Bruce Springsteen fan, I have to know is there a song for the day that's going through your day? And Sam, was there any -- I don't know how you feel about the Boss, so was there any hesitation with Mark's love of Bruce Springsteen?**

SAM PRESTI: I'm going to let Mark go first on this.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: No, I'm going to let Sam go first.

SAM PRESTI: Well, I have a little fun with his obsession with the Boss primarily because -- and this is coming from someone who's real repertoire is along the lines of Tunnel of Love and Pink Cadillac. I probably like the video for Glory Days more than anything. That's probably the highlight.

So when you only know those songs, that's when you get a real ire from a die-hard person like Mark on the Boss. But I would say it's probably more a point of fun. I tend to think most of the songs are about the mills closing and the factories running.

But it in all seriousness, Mark probably doesn't know this because I've never said it, but I actually really do like Bruce

Springsteen. I just act like I don't. But anyone that stays as relevant in his craft as long as Bruce Springsteen has and the vulnerability that the guy shows about his trials and tribulation and how that's helped him and really the loyalty that I see from the people that love him as much, the three people in my world Leon Rose, Mark Daigneault, and Matt Tumbleson. Those three people will talk about Bruce Springsteen longer than anything else in the world I can imagine.

So that would be my -- it was not held against him, but it was probably used a few times to provoke some frustration.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: And provoke frustration it did. I am a big fan. I'm a big fan of the person. I'm inspired by his work ethic and how true he is to himself. That's what appeals to me about him.

Song of the day I'll go with Land of Hope and Dreams, because the first line is, Grab your ticket and your suitcase, Thunder is rolling down this track.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you guys. Thank you for joining us today. As the other Bruce fan on the line, that was terrific. We hope everyone has a great day. Thank you.

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