

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Al Horford

Press Conference



Q. Al, Coach and your teammates have talked so much about how you've still been engaged and just being a great teammate to this group. How much pride did you take in kind of what you saw from them and the growth that they were able to do on the court this season?

AL HORFORD: Yes, very proud of our group with this unusual season that we've had with all the COVID concerns and all the rules that we had to adhere to. Just the consistency all year and the competitiveness and just the engagement, being engaged all year. So that's what I'm most proud about for the group to overcome the adversity and for us to finish out the season.

Q. Just because we haven't talked to you since it happened, can you walk us through the decision you made with the Thunder to agree to sit out to close the season and why you agreed to do it and why it was best for you?

AL HORFORD: Yeah, we've had great communication since the moment I got here, and leading to that point, once Shai's injury happened, it just kind of brought that question even sooner, both of us understanding that the team also wanted to play younger guys and see what they could do with their development, and for me, for myself, health-wise, what's best for me, putting me in the best position to be able to play at a high level for many years to come.

Q. At this point do you expect a trade this off-season?

AL HORFORD: I'm sure after all this -- usually I get away for a few weeks and things like that, I'm sure that I'll be talking with the team and we'll figure out what's best.

Q. In the past, Sam has worked with players certainly of your stature to sort of get you to places you want to be. Are you comfortable with how those conversations might go as far as working with the front office for what's best for you at this point in your career?

AL HORFORD: Yeah, we'll have to see. I think the biggest thing is the great communication that we've had here since I got here. Right from the very beginning, Sam has been very open with me, transparent, and they've made me feel like family here, very comfortable with everything. You know, I'm confident in the future that we'll have great talks when that time comes.

Q. Just as you kind of look at Shai's season as a whole, I was just curious what you've seen from him and kind of what gives you optimism about his game and his abilities moving forward in the long-term?

AL HORFORD: Yeah, the future is really bright for Shai. You know, he's somebody that really just blew me away all year with his ability, how he continued to get better as the season went on, and his ability to score, but not only score, then distribute. So many things that he does on the floor for the group.

You know, the Oklahoma City Thunder fans, they should be really excited of what's ahead because he's a special talent, and I believe he's just going to continue to get better.

Q. It was a difficult season for everybody, the Thunder not accustomed to losing like this, but with a lot of young players, as a veteran, do you buy into the theory or do you counter the theory that losing can be a habit or can sort of inflict some scars on young players, or is this something that the young players can sort of shake off pretty easily?

AL HORFORD: Yeah, it's a good question. I don't look at it like that. To your point, I think that the fact that they're coming in here, they're putting in the work every day and I've seen it, days off, practice days, leading up to game days, we're working here. We're trying to do things the right way, trying to get better, and staying engaged and competitive, and that's something that you can say about our group from the beginning to the end.

Guys really working, guys really getting some good experience, and I know nobody wants to lose, but I do believe that because of the experience and all the games that they've gotten to play, our guys are going to be better, and it's just going to be beneficial -- especially the way that

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it's being done, how hard the guys are working, how committed they are. I think everything is going to be for the best.

Q. Everybody knows the Thunder is rebuilding and there was going to be some sort of adjustment this season, but you talked about Shai and the way he progresses -- his development, do you think that speeds up the Thunder rebuild, the potential that he seems to be having in this league?

AL HORFORD: Well, his potential, he's just going to continue to -- yeah, to make the team much better. You know, he's one of those guys that he's ahead of it, like you were saying, and he's going to continue to do really good things, and that's a very good problem to have.

Q. How do you think Mark did in year number one as an NBA coach?

AL HORFORD: I was very impressed with Mark right from the beginning, his poise as a person, as a coach, commanding the locker room, that respect right away, and just leading our group, keeping us on edge, pushing us the right way. I'm very impressed with him and the years that he has to come here. Just a guy that he gets it, and the guys really follow. The team follows him. We listen to him. We embrace him. Just very impressed with him. I really am. And I really didn't know Mark before I got here. He's somebody that really has made me better, as well.

Q. Can you walk us through kind of meeting Aleksej Pokusevski, what that was like, and what you saw from him day one and then maybe the progress you saw in him throughout the season?

AL HORFORD: Well, the first thing I saw from Poku was in practice, he shot like a 30-foot three-point shot, and he was very serious about it and completely bricked it, and I was like, who is this guy, what is he doing type thing. But the thing that impressed me about him, though, is as the year went on and now that he's gotten to play more and more, how he's started to really understand what's expected of him, how to play, play more under control, and I've seen such an improvement from that day one in practice until that last game.

It was just great to see his progression, his maturity, and for him, he's going to continue to develop, but he's made huge strides from the beginning of the year to the point that I'm just really impressed, not only with his IQ but just how far along he's come in such a short period of time.

Q. This is kind of a follow-up to that, but more specific on the big men since you're a big man yourself and

you were kind of a mentor to them. What was it like seeing the progression of guys like Roby and Moses Brown throughout the season?

AL HORFORD: It was great to see a guy like Roby taking different challenges, playing different positions at times and really embracing the opportunities. He grew a bunch from the beginning of the year until now, and I believe his future is very bright.

And Moses, as soon as he got his opportunity, he really embraced it. He took it by storm. Playing in this league is not easy, night in and night out to have to prepare, everything that it takes, and I felt like he was up for the challenge. He also got better this year, as well.

Q. I want to ask about Lu Dort. He progressed, as well. I wonder what you see in him, and then maybe project a little bit. You've played with lots of very good players throughout your career. What do you see the future for Lu?

AL HORFORD: Yeah, Lu made big strides this season, especially with his three-point shooting. I think probably the year before he was hesitant. He's not hesitant anymore, and he's somebody that has gotten better shooting the three.

Moving forward, he's a very unique player. I'm not sure who to compare him to yet, but what I do know is he's an elite defender, very, very elite defender, shooting the ball much better. He's finding his way as an offensive player, knowing when to finish, knowing when to pass. I do believe his ceiling is very, very high, so he's going to continue to get better, and I look forward to seeing him improve.

Q. You played with Marcus Smart, and that's like kind of the easy comp for him. I think you've talked about this before, but after seeing him for a full season, how does that comp sit with you?

AL HORFORD: Yeah, it is -- I've talked about that one before. It is a fair comparison. It'll just be interesting to see. Smart is just a bit of a different player, but Lu's ability to defend at that high of a level and then offensively his game coming together, I just want to see where he's going to be two, three years from now just because I believe he took a big leap from last year to this year.

Q. Mark was just praising you for staying professional this year and talked about that as a first-year head coach he was honored to coach you. I'm just wondering at this point in your career, as you look back on this year in Oklahoma City, it was obviously a

challenging year for everyone, including you, but what will you remember most from it, do you think?

AL HORFORD: Just the joy of coming in here every day and working, and that's one of the things that Coach talked to me about very early on. He wanted me to be able to enjoy this process, and coming in here and practicing every day with the guys and working in the weight room and doing all those little things leading up to the game and then getting to play, that's what I'm going to remember most is just really those moments, the building up to the practice, the practices, and just the learning. I feel like I learned a lot here.

The younger guys, they were obviously learning, figuring things out, but myself, I feel like I'm doing the same. For me, it's been a very positive experience.

Q. Talking about the playing and the practicing and all that, Mark told us a couple things about just how difficult it was to make that happen, with the early morning testing and the waiting and all that kind of stuff. How much of a hassle was this in terms of waiting to get into the facility, getting up early after late flights to test? How grueling was this for all you guys?

AL HORFORD: It was definitely challenging, but I do want to thank our supporting staff here with the Thunder and all the nurses that were always testing us and taking care of us. This is part of our job, and it wasn't ideal, but we got the opportunity to play this year, and we all understood that it was going to take great commitment from everyone.

Our group, man, up and down, all year, just being consistent, just pushing through and just going through it -- everybody had to go through it, such an unusual time with COVID. This is a season unlike any other, and we won't forget it.

Q. What are your thoughts on the future of this team, Shai, Dort, Bazley and all those draft picks coming up? Are they in good shape right now?

AL HORFORD: I believe so. They have a really good group of guys, good guys, guys that are hungry. They're working. They want to work, want to do things the right way. It's very clear to me.

Thunder fans should be really excited.

Q. You were asked earlier about the potential trade. Let's say the Thunder get really lucky and they get really high-caliber players in this draft and they feel like they're closer than they are today to really

competing. Is this a situation that you would want to stick around for, or does it feel more like you'd like to look elsewhere?

AL HORFORD: Yeah, it's something that -- it's a conversation that when it comes up, I'll have to talk with the team and Sam most importantly about it and kind of go from there. I've just been very impressed with how well the organization -- it is here, all the resources that we have and all the players that we have. It's something that really excites me.

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