

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Mike Muscala

Press Conference



Q. Mike, as you can kind of zoom out now to the 72 games in 150 days or whatever it was and the challenges of the season, what did you think about this year as a whole and how the team, the players, everybody kind of handled it?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, it was quite the season, obviously much different than a normal NBA season, but just super grateful for the opportunity this season. I felt personally that I grew a lot and got a chance to get to know some really great young players and some new coaches in the organization. Overall I'm proud of how the season went, and I thought it was a season to remember for sure.

Q. Around the trade deadline you were certainly someone that seemed logical to at least be on the move perhaps or even a buyout after that, but you stuck around. Can you sort of talk us through that and sort of the decision to stay in Oklahoma City and a member of the Thunder?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, obviously around the trade deadline there's always a lot of activity. I knew it was a possibility that I might be traded, but I was really glad to stay in Oklahoma City.

Yeah, like I said, just feel like really grateful to have met and to have worked with a lot of these guys in the organization, and the fact that I was able to stay throughout the trade deadline, got a chance to know a few more players, as well, and grow with them and got to train with them, so it was great.

Q. Looking forward, as you become a free agent, how are you viewing this off-season, and is the Thunder on your radar as a potential place you'd like to come back to if that's an option?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, a hundred percent. I'll be here working out for a good part of the summer, spending time here. Also I'll go back to Minnesota, but yeah, I'd love to be here.

Q. You talk about some of the young guys that you've gotten to get to know during your time here. Just curious on your thoughts on Moses and kind of what you've seen from him in the minutes that he's been able to have on the floor?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, first thing that stands out to me about Moses is he plays really, really hard. I think that's a skill that will take him a really long ways in the NBA. His size and his activity on the glass, I'm sure as everyone has seen, is impressive, and it's consistent. It doesn't matter if there's 20 seconds left in the game or if it's the opening tip of the first possession, he comes and he brings it. I respect that a lot about Moses' game, and as he continues to develop his touch around the basket, and he's such a hard worker, I have no doubt that he'll make big strides this off-season, and I'm excited to see what the future holds for him.

Q. You've been around the league quite a bit. Can you just sort of give us a breakdown of Daigneault's first season as coach, just give me your opinion of how he handled the season?

MIKE MUSCALA: I thought he did a heck of a job. I'm so happy for Mark. He's such a caring person, and his attention to detail is phenomenal. I thought he was so consistent all season long with film work and challenging guys, improving their games, and just putting the game of basketball in perspective as it applies to the rest of our lives and making some great analogies that I thought were helpful throughout the season, and really just reinforcing doing things together as a unit, as a team, as an organization, which I think is so important throughout a challenging season. You've got different guys coming in and out of the roster.

Also just being ready to play every night. I thought he did a great job getting us ready, no matter the city we were in, the situation with COVID. If there was a cancellation of a game, we just practiced afterwards. I remember early in the season we were just talking about that, we were supposed to play Philly, and he just had us play a scrimmage pickup game because the game was canceled against Philly. I think he was just so in the moment and purposeful and diligent with everything he did this season. I'm really happy for him.



Q. I wonder if you could just kind of walk us through the progress that you saw Shai make over the last two seasons, to becoming the kind of on-ball primary creator from kind of a guy who was more secondary last season.

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, he had a great season this year. I think he's such a great scorer, but his passing and the way he just controls the game -- when you're in there with him, you feel like you know what your role is, and that's powerful as a player. For him to be able to have that presence at a young age is really impressive.

I know that he'll come back next year even better, so it's exciting.

Q. What are some of the similarities that you've seen in him that maybe you've seen in some of the other great players that you've played with? You've played with a lot of really good players in your career.

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, I would say his pace that he plays with. He seems to play at his own pace, and he's so smooth. He's just really smooth with the basketball, and his finishing ability, and he has a complete game. He can do it all.

I think, when you don't have a weakness that is glaring to the defense and that you can read -- he reads what the defense does and gives him so well that it makes it really hard to guard him, and then as a result, he's constantly putting pressure on the rim, beating his man one-on-one, and then that opens up the floor for everybody else to have open shots or to drive closeouts or to finish at the rim.

It's really a joy to play with a player like that.

Q. I was just curious how much you may have used your Spanish major and your Spanish language skills with Gaby Deck and trying to kind of help him get acclimated, and just your thoughts on him coming in at the late stage of the season that he did.

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, a little bit. I played in Spain my first year professionally and played in the same league that Gaby was coming from, so it was cool to reminisce on some times in the ACB, and yeah, to bust out my very rusty Spanish here and there, just to talk with him a little bit and to welcome him to OKC. I thought he did a great job coming in late in the season, which is not easy to do, from a whole different country and different league, and I thought he played really well.

Q. What were the conversations like with the team when they alerted you that they were essentially

shutting down your playing time for the season?

MIKE MUSCALA: It was just kind of letting me know that it wasn't necessarily for the rest of the season, but it was just kind of in the moment of, hey, we're going to -- we've got some young guys on the team that we'd like to get some looks at and to get some experience playing, and just be ready to play, but as of right now you won't be in the rotation. I appreciated their transparency as it came to that because it kind of gave me an idea of what to expect in terms of my training and trying to -- as a player, you just want to know where you stand. They were very up front about it, very transparent, and I appreciated that.

Q. Can you tell me what you thought when you first met Poku, and then up until now, maybe talk about his progress that he's made throughout the season.

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, when I first met him or saw him, his height really stood out to me, first and foremost. He's very tall, and to have his ball handling skills and his passing and shooting skills and footwork that he has at his height is really impressive.

I just thought he did a great job this season just continuing to grow. Obviously, coming in at such a young age and not really having -- not having a Summer League, having such a quick start to the season, that's really challenging.

When he came back from the G-League bubble, you could just tell the game slowed down for him, and some of the stuff he was able to do this year at such a young age was really impressive. I know he's going to have a long NBA career, and I know all the fans are excited to see how he continues to grow, and I am, too. Really happy for him.

Q. Was it a little frustrating at times just watching and not being able to help your team? And then when you did get shut down, did you feel like you needed to take more of a leadership role?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, it wasn't frustrating for me. Just to be able to be a part of this organization, and like you said, yeah, when I was not playing, I found it challenging in a way to find ways to be a leader because as a player, you often do it -- at least for me, do it on the court, being able to be out there and doing the actions, which then when you speak it -- have something to say, it makes it easier because you're out there doing it.

But when you're not out there doing it, to find that voice was a challenge for me, but I embraced it and took it as a good opportunity just to try to see the game differently without having to warm up and get all that stuff ready for the game, which is just kind of -- the routine I've been

doing for my whole career. So it was a good opportunity for me to try to see the game a little bit differently and maybe just mention some things to some guys, watch film in a different way than I had before.

Q. I'm just curious, shooting, especially from the big spot, is at a premium in the league, and you could probably go play for a better team. You could go play for a playoff team, but you talk about how you'd like to stay in Oklahoma City. Could you maybe go into that a little bit more? What are the reasons why you'd like to stay with this organization or why you were happy to stay with the organization past the deadline?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, I just feel like it was a -- I'm going to get a little emotional probably. But coming to OKC, it was just like -- I'm grateful for it, and it helped me a lot as a man and as a player. Just even this year, my family watching from home, I don't know, it just -- I just feel like the organization's values and the fans here and everything, it just aligns with what I feel. It made it just really gratifying to come in every day and go to work and just have that -- even this season, have that to do when so many people were struggling with COVID and all that. Just even the opportunity to play basketball just meant a lot to me.

Whatever happens this off-season, like I said, I'd love to be back, but I'll always be a Thunder fan and always rooting for the Thunder.

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