

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

Friday, July 30, 2021

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Sam Presti

Press Conference



SAM PRESTI: As I have for the last several years, the first thing I have to do before we start talking about the night is just I have to thank the incredible people that work for the Thunder in preparation for these types of evenings.

Obviously our scouting staff and the evaluators, everybody that's involved with the draft process in general, which really touches every aspect of the organization, just incredibly grateful to be part of a group of people that is so passionate about what we're doing, and so passionate about each other.

And you know, it's just a blessing to go through these experiences with them. So a lot of hours put in and a lot of miles traveled by a lot of people, and a lot of team work along the way. So I have to thank our staff first and foremost.

Obviously, we felt an extremely productive night for us. We are excited about the players that we were able to add and excited about those guys coming into the program, all for individual reasons. They all bring something different and I think will be positive contributors to the organization. All that being said, you know, Josh and Tre, Jeremiah and Aaron, they all have a lot of work in front of them and this is just a starting point for their careers, and certainly not the end point.

So we are looking forward to watching them, working with them, walking with them through their development paths, and you know, continuing to layer our team with young team-minded, hard-nosed and intelligent players that we feel like continue to try to play good basketball.

And we're really thrilled about all of them.

Q. Can you talk about Josh at 6? A lot of talk about guys 1 to 4, 1 to 5, but what did you like about Josh and did you have any serious considerations or any serious talks about moving into any of those higher spots?

SAM PRESTI: Sure. Well, first thing, I'll talk about Josh. I

think he's somebody that really has a lot of room to grow as a basketball player but already has shown through his experience overseas the ability to impact professional games at a very, very young age.

I think first and foremost, he makes other people better, and that's a really I think important trait. As we continue to add other players to our team, I think he's someone that can amplify his teammates, present and future. He has good size, adds everybody knows, and I think everybody understands the way he sees the floor and the way that he processes the game.

And you know, with the way that the game has developed over time, people that can recognize patterns and read situations in advance and really anticipate things are of great value. You know, he's someone that does that at a very high level but also adds other things, adds well.

So we're excited about adding him to the team. He's just a really good basketball player across the board. Because of his size at 6-9, he plays all over the place, but every position he plays, he's making others better and just helping you play good basketball, which is something that we're really striving to continue to try to be representative of.

Second part of your question, I said this when I was asked, maybe it was the lottery, I can't remember, but we always, always, always are looking to try to advance and move up. That's the case like from every pick, whether it's from 6 to 5, whether it's from 16 to 15. Like all through the draft, we're always trying to find ways to maneuver, and that's no different than any other year.

Q. It seemed like there was a premium on big, long players like Josh who get their teammates involved and can score a lot. How important was it for you guys to land a guy like that at No. 6?

SAM PRESTI: Well, I mean, there's really good players available in that area of the draft and I think a big part of the success of any player in my experience is not just the player's talent, but also the fit that they find with the organization and their ability to plug into the situation that they are in.

And we think he's a great match for us, and somebody that



... when all is said, we're done.®

as a said before, with where we are as a program, can really have a role for us over time.

You know, you mentioned earlier, the size is obviously a pretty unique thing for somebody that has that type of decision-making ability. And that's the thing with him is that he really -- his level of cognition for the game is at a very high level but there's other things that are growing with it, and we've been able to see that he's had an impact at the professional level already, and he's not even 19.

Q. You're saying that you're always looking to move up. Was there any traction at No. 6 to move up from that spot?

SAM PRESTI: It's really hard for me to say because in order for you to know, you'd have to be able to know what the other teams are thinking. I think every single team in the league is looking to try to maneuver through there, so we had a lot of people trying to get our pick at 6.

What do I think, if they thought there was traction? I don't know. I'm not sure how they would perceive it. There's a few things we looked at but relative to like were we close to anything? Other teams are the only one that is know that. But we looked at a lot of different variables.

Q. I wanted to ask about the two trades you made, moving out of the 16th spot for two future firsts, can you explain that decision?

SAM PRESTI: Yes, with the 16th pick, that's obviously a really solid pick. It's very unusual to get offered two future firsts that far out. You know, we obviously are looking at the value and just the overall valuation of the pick. And then the other team tells us who they want to pick.

So we traded 16 to get two really solid future first-round picks, and we really like Tre Mann and felt like we would be able to get him a little bit later at 18.

So it was just a valuation of the asset and I think over time, you know, we'll be able to figure out different ways to utilize those. There's really nothing more to it than that. It was way above the line for the general value of that pick, and we're going to probably make that decision most of the time.

Q. Just last one, decision to move up to get Jeremiah?

SAM PRESTI: He's a player that we've liked for some time. We think he's a really good fit for our organization. He's tough. He's physical. He's a cerebral player. He's had a really solid career at Villanova, and we felt like it was a priority to make sure that we acquired him with one of

those picks, but we weren't sure exactly if he was going to be on the board just based on some of our intelligence.

And so it made sense to consolidate those based on what we thought the valuations were going to be at 36.

Q. At what position is Josh? 2-3? Some people say he's a point. What do you see him as?

SAM PRESTI: I think it's a great question. I would say he's a basketball player and the fact that he's 6-9 allows him to impact the game in so many different ways. He plays point guard. He plays on the front court. Facilitator. I think that's the -- again, we're talking about a guy that's, you know, not 19 years old yet.

So we don't know ultimately how things are going to unfold for him. It's going to take time. It's going to take, you know, experience. It's going to take some adversities. But the ability to make decisions and to see the game at 6-9, it helps the team function at a high level, and I said earlier, yeah, I think he amplifies the abilities of the players around him, and so I think that's a big -- that's a big factor in why I think he's valuable.

Time will tell, but I think he's a smart player that has a unique skillset for this size, and he can be placed all over the court.

Q. Obviously a lot of rumors about you guys trying to move up and what was offered and what people were asking. SGA's name came up; Shai's name came up. First off did, that happen? And did you talk to him about that?

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, you know what, we don't really need to. I think everyone on this Zoom call was probably on my last end-of-season press conference. So at the end of the season, I said we're really looking forward to having a conversations with Shai when we have that opportunity. Nothing's changed in that respect. I'm still really looking forward to that.

I think what I've learned and I think all of our players understand is that we live in the age of social media, and people are going to manufacture things. When I was a kid, I used to go to the grocery store with my mom. We used to stand in line. We'd get close to the front of the line and there was this magazine rack, and it would have a lot of magazines there with things that would try to get your attention. Most of it was not true. It was manufactured to see if you could catch somebody standing in line at the grocery store and was bored, and maybe they would buy that magazine. There was a couple of them I can remember.

And now instead of standing in line at the grocery store, unfortunately it's attacking everybody through their phone. But it's the same formula. It's the same, it's for the same reasons. You can either as a player or an executive or a coach, you can either try to swim upstream against that and rail against it but it's not changing.

The most important thing is the people that it affects, and it's not something we've ever addressed with Shai because I think he understands where we're at with him, and with our history, with our players, like something like that is not taking place in that way.

Q. Are Josh mentioned he plans on playing in Summer League. Is the expectation for all four of these guys to be there and guys like Poku and Theo how important is a full off-season for these young guys considering guys like Poku and Theo couldn't do that last season?

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, so obviously we've got to get everybody here. We have to go through all the different steps with them. Obviously it's our hope and intention but I've done this a long time, and sometimes things pop up that don't allow that to happen.

I think that's going to happen, but I just wouldn't want anybody to feel like there's a problem if for some reason someone is not out there to start at Summer League from the guys we drafted.

Theo is going to play. Poku is not going to play. He got a lot of minutes this season, and we have him on a specific track and plan for the summer. We don't really feel like the summer league actually would be a huge barometer for us with him and where he's at. He's having a great summer. He looks great. He's worked his tail off, and we couldn't be more excited about it.

But you know, every single player has a different player development process and plan. His is pretty unique obviously because of what we did with him when he went to the bubble. But we just think there's a different path for him to maximize the days that he has in the summer, and you know, I think he'll be out there with the team and training on his own, but we want to make sure we're focusing on other things with him.

Q. I was wondering what your philosophy is on talent versus fit when drafting a player.

SAM PRESTI: Well, I mean, for us, like we're looking to try to forecast like who cannot just be the best player but the best player in our organization and our program.

So I think a lot of times, people talk about fit like relative to like a team, like you fit on the team. Our fit is all about fit with the program. So I would probably look at it a little bit different than that. I think we are just always trying to layer the team at the draft, at least, with young players that we feel like have the opportunity to plug into our environment, benefit from the people and resources here, and ultimately kind of given energy back to the program and create an environment where other people can thrive and get better.

So you know, I don't think we're necessarily like -- I think the thing to think about is like a draft is not a singular event, right. Team-building is something that's very layered. It takes a long time. There are certain points in time where you have these opportunities like the draft or free agency or trade deadline, what-have-you. It's a really evolving thing.

You don't know what your team is going to look like. We had a couple times, especially earlier this past season, we started out the season, and we were out-performing a lot of people's expectations to start the season. You just don't know.

So in terms of the fit, the players are changing all the time and the team is changing all the time. So we are just looking for people we think can improve and get better within our walls and find a way to blend them together and continue to improve them.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports