

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Sam Presti

Josh Giddey

Tre Mann

Aaron Wiggins

Jeremiah Robinson-Earl

Press Conference



But it's been those traits that have really helped us because they're the embodiment of the type of values and the things that are really important to the people in the Oklahoma, and as I said before, we draw a lot of our inspiration from the people in Oklahoma. So hardworking, values based, high character. We want to be representative of that, and I think this group of people, as you get to know them, will resonate with you, both on and off the floor.

With that, I guess we'll open it up for any questions.

Q. Sam, when you were looking at going into this draft class, what were some of the things or attributes you really wanted to pick up, and what did you see in each of these players that allowed you to know you had a pretty good class?

SAM PRESTI: Well, I think we've been through, as I said before, several of these in the past, and you never know how they're going to go as the draft unfolds. We draft people first and players second. Each one of these individuals, I think, really hit the marks for the type of people we want to have in our building, for two reasons. One, they have the ability to plug into our environment and I think amplify their talent as a result of that, and they're willing to do that, and the values of our organization resonate with them.

The second thing is as they get embedded and assimilated, I think they will make us a stronger organization themselves because of the talents that they bring to the table both on and off the floor.

You're looking for my opinion, like a mutually beneficial environment, and when you have something like that, that's where people can really optimize themselves and grow.

One thing that we want to pride ourselves on is we want a place that everybody is pulling together towards individual and collective improvement, and through our time with each one of these guys, we felt like they were fits for what we're trying to build, not just in the present but also over time.

Q. Tre, Aaron and Jeremiah, we know that Josh spent draft night in New York at the Barclays Center, but

SAM PRESTI: Good afternoon, everybody. Just it's really special to be all in one place and together, especially on an exciting day like this when we're introducing new team members to our organization.

First and foremost, just want to welcome the families and friends of all of our new players, and obviously this is an exciting day for them. It's the end of a journey but really the start of a brand new journey and something that will hopefully be fulfilling for the hard work that each individual has put in to this point.

I'll keep my comments brief. I just want to say that this is the conclusion of the 13th year and the launch of a 14th year in Oklahoma City. We've had a lot of players that we've drafted over the course of time, and each one of the guys up here today bring different and unique things to the table, both as players and people, but there's one common theme that I think has been pretty transcendent through the course of time of all the draft classes and the players we've tried to bring in.

I really think that this group really embodies it as much as anyone we've had, which is this is a very, very hardworking group of guys. This is a group of guys that, as I said before, have dynamic talents, different skills, different approaches, come from all over the world.

But they have one thing in common, which is they know how to work and they know how to put time in, and they understand how to play for one another.

That's going to be really important for us as we continue to build our team and continue to make progress toward the ultimate goal of sustaining excellence in Oklahoma City.



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could each of you give us an idea of what your draft night experience was, who you were with, and when you get the call, just talk us through what your thoughts were about coming to Oklahoma City.

TRE MANN: Yeah, it was nice. It was fun. I was able to spend it with my whole family, just people that I've been around my whole life who helped me get to this point, so I was with them most of the night. And then I didn't actually get the call, they called my agent, and then my agent told me, so I was just on the couch just hanging out, and when he told me I ran to the other room with the rest of my family and then we waited with the cameras and recorded and then we just started celebrating. So it was a great night for me.

AARON WIGGINS: For me, we kind of reserved out this really nice restaurant. I was home in North Carolina with family and close friends, people who were part of my journey and me getting to the point where I am. It was just an amazing feeling when I got the call knowing that Oklahoma City, Sam just believed in me and wanted me in this organization. I'm extremely grateful and happy to be here.

JEREMIAH ROBINSON-EARL: It was a great night. I was in Chicago. We were in a steakhouse in a back room. Had some family, just people close to me that have helped me become who I am today. It was a great experience.

Same with Tre, my agent got the call, so I was just out there with my family and friends, and then once Ron told me that the Thunder were going to pick me on the 32nd pick, I was just ecstatic, and we were just able to celebrate, have a great night, and I'm just grateful for the opportunity to come here and work.

Q. Josh, did you work out with the Thunder before the draft, and on draft night at No. 6 did you have any idea that your name might be called at that spot?

JOSH GIDDEY: I did, yeah. I did work out with them. But come draft night I was unsure. I had a good feeling about the Thunder when I left the workout, and I met with Sam and the other front office people. But I didn't know nothing until my name got called.

No, to answer your question, no, I didn't know before Adam walked out on stage and called my name.

Q. Josh, what are your impressions of Oklahoma City just being here for the short time that you've been here? You played point guard primarily for the Adelaide 36ers. What do you see your fit being in the NBA? Is it point guard? Is it on the wing? How do

you envision yourself in the NBA?

JOSH GIDDEY: Yeah, first impressions of the city is awesome. The fan base, the people in the organization, the city as a whole has been great welcoming us. I think I speak for all the guys when I say it's a class organization and the fans are first class. That's been great.

And then in terms of being a guard, obviously being bigger allows me to play a few more positions, be a little bit more versatile on the floor. Whether I've got the ball in my hands or as you know we've got guys that can handle the rock on this team, so I'm going to have to learn to play off the ball, as well. It's going to be adjusting to who we have on the floor, and I'm sure that won't take too long for me to work with the ball or without the ball.

Q. Tre, you grew a couple inches between your freshman and sophomore season; are you still growing? Regardless, what was that like freshman year versus sophomore with that extra size?

TRE MANN: I mean, my mom and dad are pretty tall so hopefully I'm still growing. I haven't went to the doctor lately. Hopefully I'm still growing.

Yeah, that couple inches that I grew over the summer helped out a lot, but honestly I think what helped me the most as far as being more comfortable and being able to play my sophomore year was gaining the weight. I put on about like 15 pounds, and I just felt more comfortable being able to get to the rim, playing my game on offense and defense. I'd say the weight gain helped me out more.

Q. Sam, you talked during I believe it was the pre-lottery press conference about the struggle of everyone trying to evaluate this talent in the pandemic. Is there an extra layer of that when you're evaluating an international guy like Josh? How much more difficult was that for you than normal?

SAM PRESTI: Well, I mean, it's challenging, but it's the same challenge for everybody. I have a funny story about that.

I went down to the G-League bubble this year and we had to quarantine and I was down there with our Blue Team. So I had four days to sit in my room. That was the first time I really dug into a lot of his film.

By the time I left my room I had a pretty good feel for him, I think, because I had piled up a bunch of games and I sat in there, and that was very helpful because it was just like so consistent.

Then we talked to a lot of different people, spent time obviously with him. The first interview we had with him was in Chicago, and I believe it was -- he had flown overnight, so he literally flew from Australia, got off the plane in California, flew to Chicago, right to the meeting with us. So it was -- I was actually shocked that he was still awake in the interview, and he was probably shocked that we still wanted to come out and work him out because he was so tired at the time.

But yeah, so we spent enough time, but I feel comfortable with the way that the process went, and at the end of the day the process led to him at that position.

Q. Tre, one of your main skills is shooting the ball off the dribble from deep; what players do you look up to in the NBA? Who do you model your game after?

TRE MANN: A couple players I look up to are guys like Stephen Curry, Trae Young, Damian Lillard, those guys who are able to shoot off the dribble from deep. I try to take a little bit of everybody's game and add it to mine, those same type of players, but I just feel like I'm my own player. At the end of the day I'm going to come in and do what I feel like I do best.

Q. Jeremiah, Sam described you the other night as tough, physical, cerebral. What are some of the things you're trying to bring to the game and ways in which you think you can impact things?

JEREMIAH ROBINSON-EARL: Yeah, I take a lot of pride in defensive rebounding, and I feel like at Villanova, those are two things Jay Wright takes a lot of pride in. I feel like those are two things that have gotten me to the position where I am today, and I just love to work. Just coming in, being able to work and play on the defensive end and just do what leads to success for the team, just all the little details.

Q. Josh, with both of your parents having played professional basketball, I'm wondering what impact did that have on you and how did it shape your basketball journey?

JOSH GIDDEY: Yeah, it was big. Obviously I grew up from a young age with a ball in my hands, just having my family and my parents so heavily involved in the game. Then when dad retired he came into a coaching role straight away, so ever since I was little I've just always around been around holiday camps and trainings and games and stuff.

Been involved with the game for a long time, from a young age, so it was kind of always inevitable that when I was

two, three years old I was always going to have a ball in my hands. They've been big for me, coaching me right through my junior career, and giving me the knowledge that they've had over their long careers, so it's been really beneficial for me.

Q. Did you ever consider playing college basketball in the States? Maybe you can confirm this for me, but I saw that you had a reported scholarship offer from the University of Oklahoma. I was just wondering if coming over here was ever an option versus playing professionally in Australia.

JOSH GIDDEY: It was. At one point I was really set on it. I took a visit to Colorado University, and I came back from that and I was ready to sign there, but I came back home and I just changed my mind, I guess. I started watching the NBL, and with the Next Star program they had put in place, it was something I wanted to be a part of. I was familiar with the league. I got to stay in Australia and stuff like that.

It was a tough decision at the time, but looking back on it, I think I made the right one, and I'm happy with it.

Q. Aaron, your bread and butter in college was the mid-range game. With the way the NBA is trending with that going out of style now, do you see that continuing, and why do you feel like that's one of the areas that you worked on the most?

AARON WIGGINS: I mean, that's just a part of my game. It's something that I continue to work on, and even though it may be something that's trending downward in the NBA or even wherever it is, it's a part of my game so it's something I'll always have. I think I have the ability to shoot the outside ball outside of the three, and just regardless of how things are trending I'm going to play my game and play it confidently.

Q. Aaron, you had mentioned earlier the feeling of being wanted in this organization. Just at pick 55 what was going through your mind as you got drafted and you saw your name across the screen and all that?

AARON WIGGINS: Yeah, truthfully when it got to the 50s I started getting a little worried; I was like, what's going to happen. But I never lost faith. I always had hope and I really knew there were teams that were interested in me regardless.

Once I got the call knowing that OKC was interested in me, I was super excited and just grateful for the opportunity. Like I said, I'm happy to be here.

Q. Josh and Sam, the unknown because you played in Australia is for the average basketball fan they don't watch the NBL. What do they expect to see out of you? For the average fan, what kind of game can they expect to see out of Josh?

JOSH GIDDEY: Yeah, it's tough for fans to watch the NBL being in another country, but I think I'm a bigger playmaker. I think the thing I do best is pass the ball, and I love getting my teammates involved, putting them in positions to succeed, sacrificing myself for the team's success.

I've always been a pass-first guy, but obviously being bigger as I said earlier, I can rebound, get out in transition, make plays, so that's my game.

SAM PRESTI: I'll add one thing to that because it kind of doubles down on the question I was asked earlier, which is there was so much basketball that he played at such a high level overseas, that really helped us and our evaluation because that's a really, really good league and one that has produced some NBA players recently. So you have a little bit of a barometer even in a year where there's a lot of college teams that had broken-up seasons and played less games than normal.

I think that was really helpful actually in our evaluation overall, just knowing the level of that league and the way that Josh was able to impact it.

Q. Aaron, you played with Jaylen Hoard; what did he tell you about his experience with the Thunder and maybe what it would be like once you got here?

AARON WIGGINS: Yeah, that's been my guy since high school. We're really close. Actually when I came up here for a workout before the draft and everything, I was able to see him and we were able to talk a lot, and he was just talking about how personable the staff is and how just the organization is really welcoming and they care about more than just basketball.

Knowing that you're in an organization where the only thing isn't basketball, that matters, but at the same time you have to do your job. I'm just excited to be a part of it all, and I know Jaylen loves it, so just looking forward to seeing him and being able to play.

Q. Josh, I actually was wondering how you feel your fit is with Shai Gilgeous-Alexander.

JOSH GIDDEY: I love it. When I was in Australia I didn't really play with another point guard. I always kind of had the ball in my hands 90 percent of the time just because our 2 and 3 were just so non-ball dribbling the ball, they

were more spot-up guys.

Playing with a guy like Shai I'm really excited for, and obviously it takes the pressure off me to handle the ball all the time. I'm really excited. He's obviously an All-Star level talent, young guy, as well, bright future in the league, so I think playing with him is only going to enhance my game.

Q. Josh, it was kind of a short stint, but your time playing in the Olympic qualifiers, what did you learn with that experience and being around some of those NBA guys?

JOSH GIDDEY: Yeah, it was big for me. Regardless if I made the team or not, just to be in that environment early, compete with the NBA talent we had, and I'm hoping 15, 20 years down the line that I'm still going to be a part of this program. So to get a taste of it at 18 years old and to be able to learn from the NBA vets we have and the rookies as well, so to hear their perspective on the league at both ends of the scale was really beneficial.

The world-class coaching staff that we had on that team was really good for me, as well.

Q. Sam, you're gathering quite a collection of long international playmakers who like to pass the ball around. Is that kind of where you see the game going these days?

SAM PRESTI: No, I think that for us, if you look at each one of the guys we have up here, like I said earlier, they're all different in how they play, and each one of our guys on the team is different in how they approach the game.

I do think the ability to anticipate and really process the game quickly is important with the way that the defenses are today and the way the game is officiated and just the pace of the game.

Each one of these guys really, I think, does a good job anticipating it.

Yeah, I have instances of watching each one of them in different ways in terms of how they do it. It could be defensively, it could be setting screens, it could be pursuing rebounds, it could be thinking ahead or pitching the ball up the floor, just the way they play angles. I think that's important. And obviously for us as a team the way that Mark wants to play and the way that a lot of our existing guys play.

We just want to play good basketball. At the end of the day, you've probably heard me say that on draft night, part

of good basketball is playing together, anticipating where your teammates are going to be on the floor and putting each other -- as Josh said, putting each other in position to be successful. That doesn't just mean with the ball, it could just be body movement, player movement, spacing. We're really looking forward to seeing how these guys blend together and how they assimilate with the other guys on the team. It should be exciting.

Q. What do you think of this Oklahoma heat? Hopefully you're used to it by now. Second, what does this moment mean for you and your family to be able to get to the NBA, to this point, and just to see them here to be able to enjoy this with you?

TRE MANN: I mean, the heat is nothing to me. I grew up in Florida, so I'm used to it already. I like the heat.

This moment means everything to me, especially that my family are here with me. They were here this whole way, the whole process, so just seeing them out here and seeing them on draft night, them crying, hugs, talking to me, I think that's a blessing. I'm not going to take any of it for granted.

AARON WIGGINS: Yeah, I'd say the same deal. In terms of the heat, I've always been a heat type of guy. I like the warm weather. Nothing that I have any problems with.

But I mean, it's just an amazing moment. It's everything that a kid dreams of growing up, hearing your name called in the NBA Draft and then knowing that you're with an organization and you have the opportunity to just develop and become a better player.

I'm really excited. My parents sacrificed a lot for me to be in a successful position years ago, so I'm really excited. I know they're really proud of me and my entire family. It's just crazy to be a part of.

JEREMIAH ROBINSON-EARL: Yeah, I'm from Kansas City, so I'm right up the road, so I've gotten a little taste of this Oklahoma heat before. I love it. Going to keep embracing it every day.

But yeah, I'm just so grateful to be in this position today. Got to thank God first. Without him I definitely wouldn't be in this position today. And also my mom, she sacrificed so much for me. I just want to bring it back for both of them, and I just love the opportunity to be in OKC and just being able to work with these guys every single day and become the best team and players we possibly can be.

JOSH GIDDEY: Yeah, first of all, the heat is good. We don't get this in Australia too often, so it's nice to have.

The family part is big for me because I think when you look back at your time growing up playing juniors they have such a big part in driving you around, sacrificing their time for your time. You can never repay for what they've done for you, and to have them enjoying this journey and going through the pre-draft process with you is really important, and I think they deserve this moment just as much as us players do. It was good to have them there on draft night and to be there and celebrate with them.

Q. Josh was just asked this, but Tre, what is your comfort level playing on or off the ball, especially next to a guy like Shai?

TRE MANN: I feel very comfortable playing both. In college I played a lot more on ball, but growing up I played both. I played with my best friend, Terry Ivory, for my whole life, and he was the main ball handler, and I just feel like I'm versatile so I can have the ball in my hand, make plays with it in my hand and off the ball, as well. I just feel like I'm versatile enough to help on both sides, whether that be on the ball or off the ball.

Q. Sam, specifically how do you see the fit of Josh next to Shai, and like you said, having all of those ball handlers on the floor?

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, I think he hit it. I'd agree with him. At his size and the ability to process the game and see the game, I think he's a basketball player more than anything, and that's kind of where I think the game is more or less based on the talent that you have on the team.

I think it's also a credit to Shai because of the way that he approaches the game. He makes it possible for us to kind of envision the ability to play a really team-based game where the ball is moving and there's multiple people making decisions simultaneously with or without the ball.

So I think it's a great fit. I think everybody is going to have to put their work in. I think all the guys on the table here realize that it's not going to be easy to earn opportunity and the NBA takes time to assimilate to and you have to scratch and claw as a team, as an organization. That's for sure.

But that's why they're up here is because they've been able to prove that they've been able to do that to this point, and we're betting not just -- we're not drafting them for who they are, we're also drafting them for who they're going to be over time, and I'm confident that they'll be able to persevere through whatever challenges that they face.

Q. Sam, I wanted to ask you, there was a perception

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over several years of you guys going after guys that were super athletic, super long. Not to say these guys aren't that, but to hear you talk about recognizing defenses and just the skill level that some of these guys that we've seen out of them, are you seeing a shift in just how you're looking at draftees in terms of how you're valuing maybe some of those cerebral skills or that skill development level that they're at?

SAM PRESTI: Not necessarily. I think the main thing to realize is like over the course of time, we've been fortunate enough to be here for over a decade, so it's kind of similar. I explained this to someone earlier today. It would be like saying to -- I grew up in Massachusetts in Concord where the revolutionary war started, so it would be the equivalent of asking why the minute men didn't call the Air Force in. Like the game has changed, but at the time in which we were probably a bigger, longer, athletic team, we were probably more the norm of the entire league, and there was one or two teams that, as there always are, kind of pushing change in different ways, one of which being the Spurs and the Warriors at the time.

But everybody else -- you have to play to the strengths of your team and your best players, and for us right now, I think we have such a blank canvas, we've predominantly had over the course of time have been benefitted by some truly amazing Hall-of-Fame level players that had really definitive games in how they played, and they have helped us achieve the second best record in the NBA over the last 10 plus years.

But now we have a brand new opportunity in front of us, and that's to me like one of the most invigorating things for us as an organization and also as a community is one, who we want to be and how we want to get there, but enjoying that process, and a big part of that is watching these guys grow and develop and hopefully we'll be breaking new ground not just for our team but also trying to figure out how to play the best basketball and push the league forward, as well.

Q. Jeremiah, when we think about guys from Villanova like Josh Hart, Jalen Brunson, Kyle Lowry and we think about how hard they play on every single possession, and I've seen the tape, that's how you play, so how much are you looking forward to continuing that tradition of Villanova guys in the NBA, and then how do you feel that playing for a Hall-of-Fame coach in Jay Wright prepared you for the NBA?

JEREMIAH ROBINSON-EARL: Yeah, I think it just gives a lot of credit to Jay Wright and how he develops his players and kind of engraves that mindset of playing hard for 40

minutes, doing all the little details, giving yourselves up for your team to lead to team success. I think Coach Wright for the two years I was there did a great job in developing me as a person off the court, which is most important, but then also being the best player I possibly can be for the team.

I just give all the credit to Jay Wright and how he approaches the game.

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