

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

Monday, September 27, 2021
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Mike Muscala Press Conference



Q. Mike, I know you talked about this in your exit interview last season, but since then you've signed a new contract back with the team. How does it feel to be back, and what do you see your role is going forward, especially this season?

MIKE MUSCALA: It feels good to be back, and I'm really excited for the season, excited to have fans back in the arena, and as far as my role, I want to be a leader of this team, be one of the leaders on the floor, use my voice more this year. I'm excited for that challenge. Just having fun out there on the court.

I think we're all blessed to play this game and so great to be here in OKC, so just trying to have that attitude every day.

Q. You've seen a lot of -- had a lot of teammates in this league, and Shai last year really seemed to hit an accelerator on the growth. Obviously the injury slowed that down, but from your perspective have you -- what are you expecting out of him? You've obviously seen guys probably make big steps, but what are you expecting next out of him?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, he's the best player on our team and one of the best players in the NBA, and he had a great season last year, to no one's surprise. He puts in the work, and he's a great teammate.

Going forward, I think just continuing to lead us and just -- what he's done so far has been great for the team, and I think going forward, just continuing to focus on that night in, night out. 82 games is a long season, obviously, but with the young guys on this team, just continuing to lead by example and taking guys aside, giving them some tips because he's been in the league now for a few years. We've got a lot of young guys on the team, so just helping them out.

Q. Do you expect him to still take a big leap this year?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, I think so. He seems very driven

and very humble, and I think that he has that growth mindset, and he challenges himself to have that. I think that's the mindset and the culture that we try to have with the Thunder, and I think he epitomizes that.

Like you said, he's been in the league now for a few years, and the more we hear from him, the more that he leads us, the better for us.

Q. You're kind of taking a veteran role on this team now with all the young rookies coming in. How are you feeling with all these rookies in the room, and what is it like being in practice with them?

MIKE MUSCALA: It's invigorating being around them on the court, being around good young players, players who are eager to prove themselves and who are good people. Sam and the front office have brought in good people to this team, and you can tell, just to be on the court with them and getting to know them and talk with them. That makes things fun. That makes things easy from a teammate standpoint.

On the court, I think they have a lot to -- they're going to want to prove a lot. It's natural as a young player. I think as a veteran, a guy who's been in the league for a few years, just being able to be there for them and comfort them in times when they need it, challenge them at times, too, and just keep that long-term-season mindset for them because it's -- like I said, it's a long season, and there are going to be a lot of ups and downs. When you're young you feel those deeply, the highs and the lows.

As much as the veteran guys and the coaches can do, just to help nurture that mindset, not get too high, not get too low, it'll be good for them.

Q. You and Derrick are only 30 but you're the oldest guys on the team by quite a bit. Does that feel weird at all or how does it feel just to have this young of a roster?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, I wouldn't say it feels weird. I'm excited for that, about that. It's new for me for sure, and I'm super grateful, going into my ninth season in the NBA. I've felt those highs and those lows. I continue to feel those, just like everyone does when they're feeling everything. But as you get older in the league, I think you



just kind of bring that stability hopefully to those young guys and that approach of just putting in that work every day, holding each other accountable, learning through film, and then the results will do what they do.

Q. Last season you were obviously taken out of the rotation and you seemed to be on board with that, and the team made it clear that they were going to give minutes to the younger guys. Do you know how that's going to work out this year, or do you have an expectation to be sort of in that rotation again?

MIKE MUSCALA: I don't have any expectations when it comes to that. You know, whatever Coach Mark wants from me, I'm ready to do. I've been here quite a bit this off-season in training and getting to know some of the young guys, and yeah, whatever happens I'm ready for.

Q. Along the same line, what is it that you like about Oklahoma City, because big guys that can shoot and stretch the floor are pretty much in demand, what is it you like about the fit here in Oklahoma City?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, it's a good question. I love the city itself. I think there are a lot of parts to the city that when you're an away team you don't get to appreciate, and living here the last two years I've been very happy with my time. Just feel like I'm always discovering something new about the city, and it's been fun.

From an organizational standpoint, I just feel like I really appreciate what the Thunder are about. I appreciate the fans, the people in the front office, coaching staff and the players that come in. It's been enjoyable to get to know them as new players have come in and out. I feel like every experience and most of them have been positive for me.

My family likes to come down here. It's not too far, driving down 35, straight shot, so a lot of great things about it.

Q. This is kind of a follow-up on an earlier question. You just turned 30 a couple months ago, which is still pretty young, but how does it feel to be the oldest player on the team by two weeks?

MIKE MUSCALA: I'm older than Derrick, huh? Yeah, I mean, wow, dang, I'm the oldest. I mean, yeah, it feels -- it does feel a bit odd, but like I said, I'm excited about that. Turning 30, you've got to start thinking about things a little different.

I'm ready for that, for that change.

Q. You mentioned fans a couple times in passing, but

it has been -- I think it's going to be 19 months by the time they get back in here since that Jazz game. You've seen what this place is like with a full house. How weird is that to have gone that long? You guys obviously played in places last year where they were; was it even weirder to come back home and not have them in the stands?

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, in a way. Yeah, being in some arenas towards the end of the season, like you mentioned, that they were half full, that was strange after being used to having no fans.

I'm sure as this season kicks off, there will be an adjustment period back to having fans in the arena. But it's a great thing for us as players to have that energy back, especially here with the home crowd. I know we really thrive off that, and even on the road it's fun, too. I'm excited about that.

Q. Did you watch any of the playoffs? With the run Milwaukee had (No microphone.)

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, in a way. I watched almost all the playoff games, and yeah, to see the energy in there just made me excited for the start of the season.

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