

# Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

## Shai Gilgeous-Alexander Press Conference



**Q. Obviously this is a young team this year, had some new faces, but overall what did you think of the way this group was able to come together, saw a lot of energy and kind of encouragement from the sidelines throughout the season, as well.**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, I think we had fun this year. I think that's the most important thing. It's not worth it if you don't have fun, whether you're winning or losing. I think we did so. We got closer on and off the court, and I'm excited for the future of this team for sure.

**Q. I know sitting out is never easy for you, but what did you do to try to continue to support your teammates even though you weren't on the court?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, just be there for them on and off the court, whatever they need. Like you said, obviously a lot of young guys, guys that haven't been through a full NBA season, and myself having done so. Just to help them and help guide them.

**Q. What did you learn about yourself this year?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Nothing new I would say. Ups and downs of an NBA season, typical. You learn new things offensively and defensively every season, so I'd say like basketball tactics, but myself personally, nothing new.

**Q. As the best player and leader on this team, how transparent is the front office, Sam, Mark, with you about the plan and the rebuild in general?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, very. We talk all the time, and every time we talk I get a little bit more excited. Yeah, like I said before, I'm excited for the future of this team for sure.

**Q. What gets you excited? What are you excited about?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: It says a lot about having trust and being able to trust in this business, and I think,

like Sam, myself and Coach Mark, we have that trust in each other. I can't go into details, but we're excited for the future.

**Q. Is it easier for you to stay patient since you know the plan and know sort of what to expect in the next few years?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Absolutely.

**Q. You scored 30 a game after the All-Star break. You scored pretty consistently all season but then you made a jump after the All-Star break. Did something click for you? Did something change? Was it just the flow? What happened there?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, so I was out a little bit for my ankle, really got to peel back the layers of the season, how it was happening so far. Like I said, ups and downs of the season. I had good spurts, bad spurts. There was a few things I noticed I was doing well when I had good spurts and I tried to make them an emphasis just this last little stretch of the season, and I'm going to for sure try to continue it going forward for next season.

**Q. What are you looking forward to improving next season? You got to the free-throw line more this year, still leading the league in drives per game. What's next?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Continue to work on shooting, can always be a better shooter, can always get stronger. What I'd say for me, it's just working on leadership, including the guys in my summer a little bit, making sure that we're still a close-knit group throughout the summer. We have a lot of guys that go their separate ways and are from out of the country, but just trying to keep it as close knit as we can.

**Q. What are your plans for the summer?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I'm going to go home pretty soon here, do my typical workouts five times a week, and then we have like a few things scheduled team-wise, individual-wise just to reconnect, and I'll be doing those throughout the summer, as well.

**Q. You were here the year you guys won big two**

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**straight years when you hadn't won much. How do you deal with the frustration? Everybody wants to win. How do you deal with the frustration of not winning?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, it's tough every night losing. Well, not every night losing but every night you lose it's tough. You want to win the game. We're all competitors. Like I said, from the guys in this group we all want to win badly. But when you know it's headed in the right direction, and it goes back to my trust in Sam and Coach Mark, guys are doing the right things behind the scenes, you know it'll eventually turn around. When you feel it going in the right direction, it makes it a little bit easier.

**Q. Having a full off-season for the first time in basically two years, how much do you think that's going to help not only you but players coming in, players like Maledon and Poku that haven't gotten a full season and what you're talking about, making sure the team is still cohesive this summer?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: It'll be huge. We got a chance to stuff away, regroup, look in the mirror and really get better, which will ultimately make us a better team come next season. But then like you said finding a balance and reconnecting with the group, making sure we're still a tight unit so that we go into next season with a little bit of a head start.

**Q. Your assisted two percentage was 16.8 percent of shots you were assisted on. Is that a number that you want to see go up, especially with Josh coming in?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Which stat was that?

**Q. Assisted two percentage, like the amount of times you were assisted versus unassisted --**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Oh, unassisted baskets? That's a lot of stats today, wow. (Laughter).

Yeah, that's something that I didn't know existed. But yeah, I think, sure, why not try to improve that number. We have a lot of guys that can make plays on this team like Josh, you said, and ultimately I think it'll make the game easier for myself getting more baskets assisted and easier.

**Q. In the last two years you haven't really played as much as I would assume you want to play. What's been the main thing to keep yourself positive because it seems like you haven't gotten down.**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: You're talking about games played?

**Q. Like how do you keep yourself positive, what's been the main --**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Unfortunately, both times it's been injuries, so it's not something like I'm sitting out for fun or for no reason. It's something that I understand, something that I've just got to take care of, try to avoid those things. But it's easy when you have a group of guys around you like I do who make it easy every day, and like I said, when you have fun it makes everything easier.

**Q. You and Josh didn't get a ton of time on the court together. What about that pairing between you guys are you looking forward to building on or what are some things you think you can improve when you're on the floor together?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, playing off of one another. I think you see guys in the NBA, Steph and Draymond, Dame Lillard, CJ at one point, Nurkic a little bit, I think like tandems are really hard to guard in this NBA obviously, and both of those examples I gave you have been together for a very long time. It takes time to be that good, and I think the earlier me and Josh attack it, the better we'll be and the better this team will be.

**Q. The optimism you expressed about the future, how much of that is tied into you knowing how good you can be?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, I'm very confident in myself. I'm confident in how good I can make my teammates, and I think that's the front end of it.

**Q. The tandems you mentioned are obviously elite-level combos. If you're including you and Josh in that, you obviously have a pretty high opinion of Josh. What did you see in him this season that gives you that comfort that you guys can be that kind of tandem?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: First, it's his confidence level in himself. I think that's the first thing you need. He's not the most skilled, most athletic player in the NBA. He might be the most smart, but he's not the other two. (Laughter). He gets it done every night, and he's super confident in himself. That's first and foremost.

**Q. You were talking earlier about knowing the plan and how that sort of gives you a sense of positive thought. It seems like you just might be a positive guy overall. Is that true? Do you think you sort of have an inner working that sort of maybe makes you just positive in general, and if so does that help you as you navigate through all this?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, I'm a pretty easygoing guy, but I'm human, and if I don't like something, you guys will see it. That's not the case in this situation. I'm positive for a reason, and I have good reason to be so every day.

**Q. What did you see from Tre Mann this year?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, the kid can play for sure. He's fun to watch, obviously. We kind of saw him get better every chance he got throughout the season, and by the end of the season he was a pretty good player, no matter what defense he saw. It says a lot about him, getting better through time, through experiences, and I'm excited for his future, as well.

**Q. You just wrapped up year two with Mark. He's known as a player's coach. What's your comfort level with him through this rebuild?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, I'm super comfortable with him. Me and him communicate all the time, on the same page pretty much all the time. Like you said, he's a player's coach, wants the best for us. He's open to suggestions, always has an open ear. It's not an ego thing with him. He always says he's the head coach but the players win games. Yeah, he's a good guy, and I'm glad he's leading this team.

**Q. One area you guys were really strong was on the defensive end this year. What do you think of the identity that you guys were able to build and kind of establish this year on that end of the floor?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, I just think we knew as a group, we were aware of the situation, we weren't the biggest guys out there most nights, but we knew we had to scrap and claw defensively, help each other out, really play a five-man all defense.

I think we kind of got the hang of that early, and that helped us stay in games and win a lot of games this year.

Ultimately we know, everybody knows if you play basketball if you play defense it wins championships and wins games. You've got to stop your opponents. I think that's something we tried to hang our hat on this season.

**Q. How much evolution did you see out of Lu? I know he was hampered by injury, as well, but what did you see out of him?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, Lu is going to be Lu. He can guard everybody. Can't guard me, but he's

going to be Lu.

But Lu gets smarter every year defensively. His first year he'd reach for no reason sometimes on players that look for that and get a foul for no reason. But like I said, Lu gets smarter every year, which ultimately makes him a better defender every year, and that's something that as a team it's pretty easy for us to follow defensively when we have a guy like that who plays at such a high level.

**Q. When I ask him about guarding you, what's he going to say?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Shai is a tough cover. He'd better say that.

**Q. I know you don't know where the team is going to be picking until the lottery, but are you someone who gets curious around draft time as far as who might be your new teammate or looking up highlights or getting to -- trying to know anything about those guys?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, a little bit. I know -- I think I know what range we're in, so I'll look at prospects in that range.

I don't consume my time with it for sure, just when I'm bored I'll look at stuff like that. But I think as you can see, our guys do a great job of that. All of our rookies were amazing this year, gave great minutes, and I'm excited about that.

**Q. As a leader of this group and a huge member of the team's rebuild from day one, what does it mean for you to win with this team in the future?**

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, it's super important. I think that's why we all play the game. We play the game to win. I think the more we bond, the more we spend time together, the more the reward will be when we do so, just because we're all so close, and it's like a brotherhood. I'm excited for when that happens.

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