

# Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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## Darius Bazley

Press Conference



**Q. Darius, we saw a lot of young guys get better this year, we saw a lot of competitiveness and fight. What did you think overall of the connectedness and the competitiveness of the group this year?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I thought it was really good. Like super young team, so everyone was super duper close. Everyone was super proud of everyone else's success in different parts, whenever they had some. But it was really fun to just go out and compete and get better with everyone every day.

**Q. We saw you be a really big encourager for your teammates both on and off the floor. In what ways were you supporting your teammates this year?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: Whether it was just watching someone score or hit a big shot and cheering them on from the bench or maybe I see someone in the same spot I was like a game ago or maybe my rookie year and just pulling them to the side and kind of like guiding them and kind of help them get through it, whether it was like defensively or just a different way to do something. I just wanted to be that help because I knew how much it was for me.

**Q. How much do you look forward to this being your first full off-season?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I'm super excited. I've had a lot of experiences throughout my three years, and I think this off-season will probably be the longest I've had. So I'm excited to be able to string together all these days and just work consistently.

**Q. I know that you were wanting to take on a bunch of tougher covers this year as a defender. When you look at how you were in the beginning of the season towards now, how do you think you've progressed this season on the defensive end?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I thought there was progress made, and we played these guys twice or four times, depending on who it was, so just being able to get that experience

under my belt and then be able to learn from certain games and come back and try it again has been really good, and I'm looking forward to the same thing next year.

But just improving no matter what, just getting ready to be able to be on those assignments and be able to guard those guys.

**Q. Mark said that this off-season would be kind of your first to be turned loose to do whatever you wanted to do with your time. How are you planning to structure your off-season and what are you hoping to do?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I'm hoping to improve in a lot of areas, just take everything day by day, and just focus on that day solely, get better that day. I kind of have this thing I've been doing, and it's been really good to me, like I have three things that mean the most to me. It's my family, basketball and God, and so each day I make sure I pour into those things, like whatever it is, calling my family, talking to my mom, siblings, checking in, whatever.

With basketball, it's a very long off-season, so just being able to kind of take it like a marathon and be able to finish my strongest towards the end. So whether if it's eating the right things or taking the proper recovery that day or going to the gym twice, whatever it is, lifting.

Then God, just spending time with him and reading and stuff like that.

Just doing it like that, just making sure I keep the main things the main things and just stay laser focused because at the end of the day I just want to continue to improve and be able to come back the best version of me so I can help this team.

**Q. How is your knee feeling and when do you expect to ramp back up to full basketball activities?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: My knee is feeling pretty good. I am taking this time off to just kind of let it heal. It's bone. I'm just looking forward to being able to get back on the court, and like you said, ramp things up. But I've just got to take it time by time.

I'm going to take the rest of this month and just kind of chill

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and give it the proper healing and kind of take back.

**Q. When you first got here you talked about how much you love to cook. Is that something you are going to do a lot in the off-season? Do you have time to do it during the season?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I'm going to leave that to the professionals. (Laughter).

**Q. As one of the longest-tenured guys on this team, I'm sure you're aware of the rebuilding plan and everything like that. How much talk do you have with Sam or the front office to make sure you're on the same page with them and you know what to expect moving forward?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I think as a whole, everyone kind of understands our goals here. There's been a lot of communication and there's clarity here for everyone to understand that we're focused on getting better as individuals, as a team, because at the end of the day you want to win and compete.

I think we're building something really special here, and we've done a really good job of just creating an environment where guys can come in and work and be able to get better and be the best version of themselves.

**Q. How close do you think you are as an organization to be back on a contending level that you were say your rookie year?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: There's no telling. I think that, like I've said, the most important thing is just growth, just to be able to continue to get better. I think we finished the season a way better team than we were in the beginning. I think we were a way better team than we were last year. I think the growth will just continue to keep going upward.

**Q. Talking about growth and improvement, was there a guy maybe on the team that you helped along the year that something happened later in the season, or like, yes, that was what we were talking about, he made that step? Anything like that that stands out for you?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: No, no one like in particular. I would say it kind of takes a village. We're so connected and so together, everyone just kind of chips in and helps everyone. Everyone has their moments -- or has had their moments where they've made a step or they've grown in some area this year. I mean, it's been good to just watch guys just get comfortable and kind of like just go through their seasons. Like I said, it's a really young team, had a

lot of rookies, and I was there three years ago.

**Q. Was there any moment for you that you had that you thought, yes, I've been working on that, I've made a big stride there, anything like that for you?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: Nothing like on court, like skill-wise, anything like that. It's more so just kind of like mindset stuff, stuff like that.

**Q. Can the fans expect any more music from you in the off-season?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: Um... no. It's a hobby. You probably can expect music under like a video of me working out or something, but I mean, I don't want people to think that I'm trying to become Jay-Z or something.

**Q. You're going to leave that to the professionals?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: Exactly, yeah.

**Q. How close do you follow the draft? The front office has four picks, like the top 34. There's going to be new guys coming in. How closely do you follow the lottery and the NBA Draft itself?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I'll watch the draft when it's on. I don't know what day it is. I might see lottery stuff if I'm scrolling on Instagram and Slam or somebody posts, these guys have top picks or whatever, but I don't really pay close attention to that.

**Q. Does that generate any excitement for you guys knowing that somebody likely in the top 10 will be joining your team next year?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I can't speak for everyone else. Me, I don't really care. Like I'll be happy for whoever gets drafted and stuff, but when I say I don't care, it's like, I don't pay attention to that stuff. Like I didn't even pay attention to past -- these guys that are on the team now. When they got here, it's just like, just trying to become as close with them as possible and just keep going.

**Q. You've been around Shai for a while now. He seems to just be more and more confident every year. What have you seen as far as him just growing more comfortable and stepping into a larger role and how his personality is?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I mean, it's been a pleasure to be around Shai and play with him, play alongside him. I mean, I think his game kind of speaks for itself. He's had an amazing year. Like you said, he stepped into a bigger

role, and you could definitely see down the stretch and stuff. But I started smiling when you mentioned his name because just Shai the person is like -- he's just a joy to be around, you know what I mean? I've never seen Shai mad or not in a good mood. Like he's always smiling, laughing.

I think he's just becoming a better leader, helping the young guys and stuff like that. That's what I've been most proud of is just kind of seeing him become more of a leader.

**Q. Does that sort of set like a better mood among the team that your leader is seemingly always in a good mood or having a good time out there?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: Yeah. I mean, I think as a whole, we've -- in the beginning of the season we all agreed that we were going to create an environment where people could come in and get better. I kind of said this earlier, but like just create an environment where people could come in and get better and just continue to be the best version of themselves.

I would kind of give that to everyone. Everyone kind of pitched in there.

**Q. What was the biggest lesson or the best lesson for you during this season to carry over for the next season?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: That's a good question. I'll be honest, I haven't really taken the time to really reflect on this season yet. That's not something I'm able to answer right now.

**Q. You are going to be eligible for a rookie extension this summer. How are you going to plan on approaching that?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: I don't know, honestly. I don't really pay attention to that. It's kind of like my agent will call me at some point. I don't know how that goes.

**Q. With you being one of the faces of New Balance, could we see a signature shoe coming from you moving forward in the future? Is it in the works?**

DARIUS BAZLEY: No.

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