

# Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

Saturday, June 25, 2022

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

**Sam Presti**  
**Chet Holmgren**  
**Ousmane Dieng**  
**Jalen Williams**  
**Jaylin Williams**

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'd like to welcome everyone here today and watching at home to the Clara Luper Center For Educational Services here in downtown Oklahoma City. We're super excited to have everyone here today to meet our 2022 draft class.

Before we talk to Sam and our draft class this year, there are some special guests we'd like to acknowledge. This year for the second year in a row, we're having our Community Draft, so we have some selections of some great community leaders that we have who are in attendance today who we're honoring and are part of the festivities here with us today.

We have Susan Brown, who works for the Education and Employment Ministry, also known as TEEM. We have Lisa McKean, with OKC Public Schools, and we have Paul Stafford, who works for the National Alliance of Mental Illness, also known as NAMI.

Then we also have Marilyn Luper Hildreth, who is the daughter of this building's namesake. She took part in the sit-ins at Katz Drugstore downtown in 1958. She's one of 13 kids who did that. So she's an incredibly important person, as is her mother, who the building is named after. Let's give a hand to our community draft picks.

(Applause.)

With that I will toss it to Sam for some opening comments.

SAM PRESTI: I want to thank everyone for being here today. It's obviously a very exciting day for the organization and for the community, and especially being here in the Luper Center and having Marilyn here is a



tremendous thing. She's a great friend of our program, and obviously her efforts were tremendously important to the evolution of the community and the country at large.

I also want to thank and welcome all the families of our players, of our draft class this year. Those people are obviously critical to just the people that you're seeing in front of you, and you're going to get to know over the course of time here in Oklahoma City. Their representation, as well; we're really grateful to have great relationships with the agents and everybody that's associated with these players.

I also want to take a moment to just also recognize all the different mentors, teachers, coaches that have impacted these young men throughout their lives. I think we cannot underestimate the influence of mentorship and the people that pour into young people as they're growing so they can get to these types of achievements. Not everybody is going to be an NBA player, but people are influenced by those around them and the people that are touching them as they go through the evolution of life.

You know, this is a culmination of a real journey for each one of these individuals. Every single one of them has gotten here on a different path. Each one of those paths has been unique, and every one of them has not been a steady rise or steady climb. There's been adversity for every single individual here.

One of the reasons they've gotten here is because they have some of the qualities that we look for in young people when we choose to believe in them and to invest in them.

I also think it's important to recognize that you're going to -- these guys are going to play a long time in the NBA, and as I said before, the journey is really, really long and arduous, but there's only one day that you get drafted, and there's only one day that you have your draft press conference.

I've done a few of these over the years, and I try to really not take them for granted because I know that it's the one time that each one of these guys is going to have this experience. It's kind of like overseeing a wedding a little bit. So I try to be very sensitive about that because it's a one-time thing, and it's very important for everybody.

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We've had a lot of great players that have come through our organization over the years, and they've had a day just like this, where the future is bright but no one knew exactly what was going to happen. There was a lot of hard work in front of them. This is kind of the starting point of their careers, and it's really exciting to be able to share this with every one of them.

Last year, we had four players up here, and it was our first draft class of our opportunity to reposition and replenish the team. I'm looking at these guys, and it's another four guys, and there's a couple common threads, I think, between these two groups of people that we've been able to present to the community.

The first thing is I think over the last couple years, we've been able to bring some tremendous young people, not just players but tremendous young people to Oklahoma City, and I think that's a really, really important part to what we do is we partner with our city to continue to allow it to thrive and evolve, and I couldn't be more proud of the human beings that are going to be wearing our jersey. I feel like two years in a row we've been able to accomplish that.

The other thing is these are extremely hardworking people. As I said earlier, they all come from different places. They have had different experiences, but there's a common thread of hard work, and as we know, the state motto here is "Hard Work Conquers All," "Labor Omnia Vincit." I've mentioned that a few different times. I think these guys personify that in combination with the last group of guys we presented. It's only going to kind of multiply over time.

The last thing that comes to mind when I think about them as players is I think these guys are really solid decision makers. The game is a game of decision and has continued to become a game of decision. As I said at the end of the season, when we're playing our best, there's less pattern and more rhythm to what we do, and these guys are rhythm players, and they're instinctual, and again, I think when you combine that with the last group we have, you can see that that type of player amplifies those of the other people wearing the jersey with them, and that's really exciting.

You have three stages of the draft, one you find out where you pick, two you select the player, and three, you have to develop the player. By far three is the most important aspect of that process. It's also the longest. There's three key aspects to me in stage 3 that are really important.

Number one, you have to be willing to stay with things longer in development because development is a process and not an event. The second is it's more meaningful

when there's a group of people developing together because they're sharing experiences, and sports is about experiences and knowing each other, and not every experience is great, but when you're going through it together, it can be a very unique and gratifying thing. That's, I think, what our team has been going through the last year, and I'm excited for what these guys are going to add to that group.

The last thing is the people that have calm endurance through that process are more rare than people that are just talented. So as talented as these individuals are, the success that we're going to achieve and they're going to achieve individually will be based on their ability to endure what's really hard about the NBA, which is that it's a lot of adversity, there's a lot of demands, there's a lot of sacrifices, but when you draft someone, what you're essentially saying is you believe in them, and we believe in all of these guys, and we're really excited to bring them to Oklahoma City. I think they're going to be well received as people and players.

Just a round of applause for the journeys these guys have been on.

(Applause.)

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions from the media.

**Q. For Jalen, what was your thought process when they drafted the second Jaylin Williams, and how do you plan to distinguish the two of you while you guys play?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: Well, it's a really cool moment. I think it's pretty rare to have somebody with the exact same name as you. Yeah, so it was kind of surreal. I go by J-Dub and that's J-Will, so we've kind of been figuring that out since we got here.

**Q. Did you select numbers that look similar on purpose?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: No.

**Q. Sam, I was wondering if you could talk about the length that you got in this draft class, three guys 6'10" and taller but all have great length and height and wingspan. How did that factor -- is there something there with the length you got in this group?**

SAM PRESTI: Well, I think besides the physical measurements of each player, I think in combination with the way that they process the game, and last year I said

that specifically we're talking about Josh, and just the fact that a big part of his selection was his ability to amplify those of the future players that we bring in.

I feel the same way about this group of guys. They process the game extremely well. They happen to be really big, and I really felt that when I was walking up here, everybody together, and being around the families, as well.

But I think the combination of decision making at that size, what it really does is -- the other component to decision making is it allows you to make better decisions with more time. Time is also a critical part of the game itself. The best players in the world create time.

One of the ways you get added benefit and create more time is your ability to see over things. So we've seen that play out with different plays across the NBA. I think these guys are good decision makers on their own, but when you add the size to it, it creates more time, and everybody makes better decisions with more time.

**Q. Sam, sort of a follow-up to that question, you mentioned the same exact thing last year about maybe a shift in mentality of the types of players and the types of skill sets that you're looking for, and these guys certainly represent that with the combination of size and decision making. Was there a point that going through this rebuild you had a pretty blank slate that you wanted a team to look like this and have those sort of traits?**

SAM PRESTI: Well, I wouldn't say that there was a shift in that. I just think that when we -- this is our 15th year, and for a majority of the years that we were selecting, we were selecting deeper in the draft for the most part. It's also harder to get a lot of players on the court with the level of teams that we had for the last 12 years or so.

When we were starting here, the game was like completely different.

I think Jenny asked me this question last year and I was basically saying, it would be like saying to yourself, why didn't we have the Air Force at the Revolutionary War. Well, you can't take today's context of the game and place it on history because that's just not historical. That's like retrospective.

The game has changed over time. We also have access to different types of players.

The other thing that's clear is the great players that drive winning in the NBA are unique and have their own identity, and we had a series of those. Your team takes on the

identity of your best players, and the identity of our best teams over time, we were always pretty big, we were extremely athletic, and we competed at an extremely high level. That's how we stayed the course for over 10 years.

We're at the beginning stages of hopefully another sustainable run of success. I think the starting point here is relatively blank, but ultimately our best players are going to drive the identity of the team. We don't have complete control over that, but I do think the league has certainly amplified to less patterns, more rhythm, and these guys create rhythm for their teammates as well as themselves.

**Q. For all the players, whoever wants to answer, now that you guys have been drafted, what's the thing that you're looking forward to most about being in the NBA?**

CHET HOLMGREN: I'll take that one. Putting on that jersey and lacing up my shoes. First and foremost, getting to work, and then lacing up and playing with these guys.

JAYLIN WILLIAMS: I would definitely say the same thing, just putting on the jersey for the first time would be definitely one of the things I'm looking forward to but also competing at a high level and getting better.

**Q. For both Jalens, you guys had the chance to play against Chet last year. What makes him so special as a defender?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think just being seven plus feet tall and being able to move the way he does and stretch the floor by the way he can shoot. I think he goes by "Unicorn" term, and I think that perfectly kind of describes what he's able to do offensively and defensively.

JAYLIN WILLIAMS: Yeah, kind of just what he said. His size and the way he's able to move just helps him on defense and offense, and he's just a crazy player to play against.

**Q. Chet, this time last year you hadn't even played a college game yet, and now here you are. What did you learn in that year in between that prepared you for this moment?**

CHET HOLMGREN: It's hard to sum that into a quick answer for sure. There were a lot of lessons every single day. Just showing up to practice, especially with the people that I was around every day from the coaching staff to the players. We had a lot of great basketball minds, and I learned a lot more than I could say in any two or three sentences.

**Q. Chet, from all the reports, not sure if they're true or not, but all the reports say this is the place you wanted to be. If that is true, can you talk about what it was about OKC that made you want to be here?**

CHET HOLMGREN: Well, now that I'm here, I can officially say this is where I want to be. This is a great organization, great city, great fan base to be in. Again, it's hard to sum up why I would want to be here into a couple sentences. I kind of said it best when I said it's a great organization with great people and a great vision for the future.

**Q. Ousmane and Sam, could you talk about how things went down on Thursday night? Ousmane, from your perspective, getting drafted, getting moved to the Thunder, and Sam, to package three future first-rounders, you've been acquiring first-round draft picks like crazy, this is the first time you expended some, why was it on Ousmane?**

OUSMANE DIENG: Sure, for me I was just happy to be in the NBA, and now I'm really happy to be part of the Thunder, the great organization, great people, like Chet said. I'm just happy right now.

SAM PRESTI: So I can speak a little bit, a couple of quick stories about some of these guys. I was talking to use man's father last night a little bit. I didn't realize he was -- the first time I saw use man play I was at inn September, which is also Tony Parker's -- what would you call that, like an academy, like a training academy in France for some of the most advanced players that's been around forever. I went to see a game there. I think he was 16 or something like that at the time, several years ago, before the pandemic. I lost complete track of time with the pandemic.

That was the first time I saw him play.

Then obviously when he went overseas, it was a huge challenge. I actually thought -- I was really fascinated by that decision because I think the easiest decision would have been to kind of stay in a comfort zone, and he pushed himself out of that, and it wasn't always the easiest situation for him. But we know some people, teammates that he had, and they just spoke glowingly about his work ethic. So that was really helpful.

With the actual decision, the way I would look at that is we had 12 and 11, and so we wanted both players. It was a way to get both players as much as it was to get one. We were looking at the way the board was breaking, and Jalen -- quick story on that one, I saw Ousmane when he was 16. The truth on Jalen is our eyes really opened to him later in this process. I wish I could tell you that last year at

Santa Clara we were like, this guy is going to be a lottery pick. That wasn't the case. But he just beat the door down with the way he approaches the game.

Then I had a very pivotal conversation with his college coach, and I shared this with Jalen, his coach college is Herb Sendek who I've known for a long time. To hear the two people speak about each other -- so I had dinner with Jalen, and he spoke so personally about his relationship with Herb, and then the way Herb spoke about Jalen and that relationship, it blew me away the authenticity that those two had created, in combination with going back and watching the film again,ing it was like, it's kind of staring us in the face.

For our particular team, his approach to the game -- he can play everywhere, and I feel the same way with Ousmane. So it was like, these are guys that you had two draft picks, but they're filling a lot of different avenues for the team, so the price we paid for that was how do we get two players -- three players in the top 12 essentially, and that's how we came to that conclusion.

**Q. Just want to talk to J-Will pretty fast. What do you think you'll mostly contribute to this team going forward?**

JAYLIN WILLIAMS: Honestly I feel like I'm willing to do whatever the team needs me to do, whatever the coaches, my teammates, whatever they feel like I need to do to help the team I'm willing to do. I can be an energy guy, whatever it is. I'm ready for it.

SAM PRESTI: Can I add a story on that one, too, because they're so humble and aren't going to -- seeing J-Will play -- J-Dub, thank you for clarifying that. That's helpful. But seeing him play is a blocker-tackler. He's a guy that makes teams function, and he has big-time passion to play, and he's physical. Those things are, I think, important for teams, and people are going to enjoy playing with him because of the things he brings to the table. It's all about the collective for him, and you can see that in how he approaches things.

My Chet story is watching him at USA Basketball several years ago. He was playing against a lot of older players, but his impact on the game and his physicality and his willingness to put himself in positions as a competitor were very unique against some of the upper competition there.

I was going to that event, and he was a sophomore, and I had a couple people say to me, you need to check out this guy from Minnesota. So I spent a lot of time watching him, and it became pretty clear that -- people see his size, obviously, but his ability to play within a team framework

but still be exceptionally talented and see how that actually can be thrown into the team to boost its high-end performance is really unique. He's got an incredible team mindset, but an elite level of understanding of the game at his size.

That really stood out from day one. Then seeing him at Gonzaga was interesting because it was a little bit different because he was playing with an established team, and I specifically went to see him practice -- we talked about this, at San Diego, but I just wanted to see how he carried himself amongst a group of older established players that are really, really good, and he was one of the guys, except for when the game started and then he let his talent speak.

But it's a tremendous combination of different qualities for him.

**Q. J-Dub, you posted a TikTok in January about how Kobe Bryant is one of your inspirations. Is that factoring into you number at all? And what is your first memory of Kobe Bryant?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, so I picked 8. I think 24 was already taken, but 8 is definitely just a tribute to Kobe. Yeah, I just grew up watching him. Kobe kind of speaks for himself and the legacy that he has. You're hearing "Mamba mentality" a lot, and I kind of carry that into myself, as well. But he plays a big part of it in my life, as well.

**Q. Sam, in your exit interview you said that maybe an underexplored option is you have four picks. That obviously changed, but you still ended up with four guys in this draft. What are you expecting the competition for roster spots to look like this off-season?**

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, just to clarify the question for everyone that wasn't at the last press conference, we had four draft picks, and there was an assumption that we wouldn't draft four players because we don't have four roster spots. But I think that's an antiquated way to look at the draft, because the training camp doesn't start until October. We're not going to pass on a player that we think -- that we believe in or we want to invest in because we don't have a roster spot that day.

Those things are going to sort themselves out. There is going to be a lot of competition. Competition is healthy. These young men are now professional players as well as the other players on our team are professional players. It's their job. They'll come, they'll compete, they'll prepare, and there's things at stake. That's part of being a pro athlete.

But I don't think it makes sense for us to pass on

opportunities to infuse talent into the team just because we can't fit the dinner table perfectly like that next day, because what happens if one of the players you pass on could have expedited the upside of your team at some point, but you're like, well, that day you didn't have room. We'll figure that out. It'll sort itself out over time.

I wouldn't shy away from doing that in the future, as well, because Clay and I talk about this all the time, we're competing in a league where there are teams in our league that are spending \$400 million on their team, and for us, we have to utilize every advantage we possibly can to create competitive advantages.

Yeah, there might be some times that we have to move off a player or release a player that's making guaranteed money, but with where the NBA is going in terms of the infrastructure and the way the rules are designed, at least for now, those are decisions we have to make competitively. That's our competitive advantage is our willingness to do that.

**Q. One more roster related question from me. Can you tell us where you're at with Lu on contract discussion talks and his upcoming option?**

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, you know me well enough I'm not going to comment on anything related to conversations we may or may not be having. The only thing I can tell you is that we have an option on that agreement, and obviously it's our plan to exercise that pending anything different. So I would just plan on that happening unless something changed.

Everybody knows how we feel about Lu and what he means to the team. With that being said, he'll be a free agent after next season, and we'll have the ability to have those conversations with him at that time.

It's a good situation for us because it's our decision on the option, and if something changes on that, we'll certainly let you know.

**Q. Have you guys been in contact with the other current Thunder players, and what kind of messages do they have for you guys?**

OUSMANE DIENG: I talked a little bit with Theo and talked a little bit with Josh. Yeah, they're just happy to have us here, and yeah, excited to start working with them.

JAYLIN WILLIAMS: Yeah, Jeremiah hit me up and he's basically saying if I need help with anything, let him know, welcome to the team, things like that.

CHET HOLMGREN: Jeremiah hit me and gave me the same message that J-Will got, and then I've been in contact with Josh and actually met him last night. We're ready to get to work.

**Q. Do you and Josh have any prior relationship? I've just seen it on Instagram, but I don't know if you guys have a real relationship other than that?**

CHET HOLMGREN: No, before last night I had never met him before, never played against him or with him, but that'll change.

**Q. J-Will, these other three guys kind of had their celebrations on national TV but we saw a great video of you getting the call and finding out you were drafted to the Thunder. Can you take me through the emotions you were feeling as you got that call and what your celebration was like?**

JAYLIN WILLIAMS: Yeah, for sure, it was an emotional night. We were supposed to invite only like 90 people but since it was my hometown I had more family there than what I expected. It was like 200. So we had a lot of people there, and just sharing that moment, that energy, everything that was in the room with my family, it was something I'll never forget. I'll never regret having it in my hometown.

**Q. In relation to the story Sam just said where going into last year you might not have been in that lottery pick range, what changed for you last season at Santa Clara for you to get there, and what's it mean to be the first Santa Clara guy to be drafted since Steve Nash?**

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, so Santa Clara went through a lot during COVID so it was really hard to get in the gym and find a routine. My sophomore year I went about a month and a half without even being able to shoot a basketball and being kind of isolated from the team with an injury and then trying to get back, and then right when we got in the flow we got shut down again.

So it was kind of crazy in that regard, but just this past season I was able to get in the gym and work out, and I think that really boosted my confidence again, just being able to kind of get a set schedule. Happy that that worked out, obviously, and then yeah, it's kind of special to be kind of in the same breath as Steve Nash from a player aspect and be able to make history for a school and kind of put my school on the map in that regard. It's definitely something I'll take with me forever.

**Q. Chet, how do you feel like you fit in with a Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Josh Giddey? I think people**

**are looking at you three to base the offense around. Shai is such a good scorer, Josh Giddey is such a good play maker. How do you think you fit in with those two?**

CHET HOLMGREN: I feel like I fit in pretty well with them. Obviously they're great players. They can do a lot of things on the basketball court. Shai is known as a really good scorer. He can get anywhere on the floor that he wants to without much help, and Josh is a great passer. Both of them really shift the defense and move the defense.

Just going out there and being a great floor spacer, vertically and horizontally, whether it's lob threats, space the floor from three, find them in transition, whatever it might be that Coach draws up, I feel like I can go out there and help execute that and help make my teammates better as well as them helping me be better.

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