

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Sam Presti Press Conference

SAM PRESTI: Just want to thank everybody for joining us this morning.

Obviously I think everybody is aware that earlier today we announced that Chet would be missing this season with a Lisfranc injury to his right foot. This is a rupture of the tendon and not a fracture. I think just a couple things about -- about the injury itself.

One, this is an acute injury. It's something where it's the result of him basically being pressed down, getting ready to jump at the exact time that he was getting -- he was getting force on his foot; a millisecond earlier where he's up in the air already or a millisecond later where his foot is flat, then you're not dealing with something like this.

So I've talked quite a bit about the role of luck and good fortune and bad luck and the role that plays in our lives and also in sports, and this is just a great example of getting some -- getting some bad luck. You know, I wish it wasn't the case, but this is just kind of the -- this is just kind of the hand that we've been dealt.

Long-term prognosis is obviously very positive for this. We've consulted with three of the top foot specialists in the -- in the country everybody is in agreement that this is kind of like a wrong place, wrong time situation and he's going to make a full recovery.

He also, you know, is going to require surgery. There's another consensus on that so we have taken our time to kind of go through these steps the last couple days and get to this point as we gather more information.

I'm obviously really disappointed for Chet because this is -- he was just having a monster summer. He's been playing with tons of NBA players over the course of the summer and getting better and better and better. In this case, we are just going to have to wait a little bit longer for his presence to actually take the floor for us. But I know like who he is, especially over the last, you know, few days where I've watched him have to go through and process all this. He's absolutely the right guy for us. He's got a great



mentality.

Obviously he was disappointed initially and I'm sure he still is. But his spirits are high. He's ready to roll in terms of the rehab, and I think he's going to do a really great job with it.

This injury itself, just a little more about that. I know everybody has probably played Web M.D. and Googled a million different things. I always caution against that for your own safety, not just for your professional safety.

But it's an injury that's very, very common in football players and even in the season, there's actually four or five of them already during the season. It's not one that's really common to basketball players, like I said, because of just the uniqueness of where the force has to be and the way that people have to have contact. It's a contact injury, is the way it was described to me.

So short-term setback for him and short-term setback for us. There are a lot of NBA players that have had this not exact injury but have had injuries their rookie season: Joel Embiid, Ben Simmons, Blake Griffin, to just name a few; Nick Collison who I think is going to be really helpful through this process and for us and for Chet.

Injuries happen to young players and they happen to older players. The timing of the injury is, you know, just not something that you control.

As far as the way that he'll use this time, I've said this before: Whenever we have bad fortune or something doesn't go our way, my experience has always been, at least here, there's always something good that follows that in some way, shape or form, and I'm confident that that's going to be the case here. Like something positive will come from this as long as we take it in and understand that, you know, we have to have humility and we have to have gratitude as we deal with the setback.

And I think with Chet, you know, he's going to have a full year or full season, I should say to focus in on his performance, his body, learn the NBA, get acclimated, build relationships here. I think there's going to be some positives that will come from that. The team itself, you know, I think that there will be other people that emerge. There will be other people that get opportunity. We'll learn



some things. We'll have to figure some things out, and I think we'll be, you know, on the back side of this when we get Chet back, you know, he'll be -- he'll be coming back to a stronger team.

And like I said, we've had our fair share of injuries over the course of time. And we have to approach it the same way. If we get bad luck, good luck, I've always kind of tried to instill in our organization that either way, we have to handle it with gratitude and we have to handle it with humility because when you're in the NBA, it's a pretty chaotic world and unforeseen things are going to happen. So the ability to kind of keep pressing through that and being able to adapt and adjust is really key.

I think about it from a team standpoint, we are trying to climb our second mountain, basically in, Oklahoma City. Like I said earlier, there's going to be plenty of setbacks and adversities, and when we get where we want to go, we are going to be able to look back at this as well, and say, hey, do you remember when we had to overcome this as well. I think it's going to actually be something we'll look back upon and look at as like a source of pride that we managed through this as well.

We are also set up I think really, really well because of the fact that we are building something that can be sustainable, and we have a long runway with our team because of its age. Chet will be a huge factor in that. But it's bigger than one season or one game for us, and we just have to be patient as we go through this.

I was explaining to someone the other day, if you asked me before the lottery, right before I walked into that room if I would want to take my chances of going through the Lottery with the odds, picking -- you could pick between one or you could pick eight, or, the other option is you could have Chet Holmgren, but you have to wait a year to get him, I would -- I would not let you finish the sentence.

So, yes, it's a little bit of delayed gratification, but that's okay. You know, that's part of -- that's part of where we're at right now. But we're still in a very advantageous position because Chet's in great hands. Donnie and the group are doing a great job with him. He's extremely motivated and he's going to be able to find value and work on himself throughout the season, even though I know that he liked to be on the court.

If there's one thing I could say to our fans, and this is important. This is Chet's first experience, really, in Oklahoma City. I think that it's a very special place to play. And I would just tell our fans, let him know that you care. Let him know that you have his back, because this is type of guy that's going to have your back, and he's going to

have your back for a long time.

And I kind of, in a weird way, the way the relationship is starting between him and the fans is, you know, Chet hasn't made a basket for this team yet.

So you know, I think our fans being supportive of him and showing what it's really like to play here and why it's such a special place to play, without even having put the ball in the basket yet, I think that's pretty unique.

And so I would just say, let him know that you care, let him know that you have his back because he's going to have yours, and he's going to be a special guy for you to watch over the course of time.

So that's it. I'd like to take any questions. I know that there's a bunch of hands up, and be happy to answer anything with respect to him.

Q. Has there been a date set yet for the surgery?

SAM PRESTI: No, we have gone through that. First going through the different physicians. It's pretty standard practice what you do. Once we got the consensus opinion that surgery was going to be required and this was, you know, kind of the most conservative way to approach, this I decided that we should -- we should just make the news public and get out in front of you.

We don't have something specific, but it will be in the coming weeks, I would say. There's no specific timeline as to when you need to do this. But we'd obviously like to do it earlier once we can get the logistics of that handled.

Q. Just to confirm, is the expectation that he's going to be ready and healthy by the '23-' 24 season?

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, again, the one thing I would say is that you know, when people give timelines, and this is one of the reasons why this is why we're always careful with this with you guys, everybody's body is different and everybody handles things differently.

We're going to be extremely conservative, and we are with our players generally. I think you've seen this over the course of time. I mean, Damian Lillard, Steph Curry, like there's plenty of examples of people that are protecting their guys.

In this case here, like that's the rough timeline but I don't think we'll be looking into something into next season based on every piece of information we have.

Q. It's obviously easy to question things after the fact

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

but your thoughts on any of your guys playing in a Pro-Am event, and this one obviously drew a lot of attention and that there was condensation on court and had to be canceled. Might be impossible to tell if that was a factor but anything you can tell us on that?

SAM PRESTI: Well, there's a couple questions there. I don't think the condensation on the floor was a factor because, I mean, obviously this happened pretty early, and I don't believe that issue came up until later.

The way I can answer the other question is, the NBA sanctions these places. It's not like we are making, the NBA is kind of making that determination; that this is an okay thing to. And players are going to play in these because the NBA is saying that they are okay to play in.

The other thing is, you know, guys are playing all over the place all the time everywhere. If you have players that love to play, they are going to play basketball. Every time you step on a basketball court, something like this could happen. It could happen in a game. It could happen in a practice. It could happen in a scrimmage. I mean, Chet was playing with Embiid and Tatum and Durant and a bunch of other guys a few days before he went up there. It's just part of it.

And it's also one of those things where players are pushing players to play more. That's a big factor in the league right now is load management and things of that nature, and people just have to recognize that when players are going to play more, the risk is higher that something like this can happen. It just leads to the fact that this is -- it's a one-off thing. It's a random thing to happen and unfortunately it didn't go our way.

Q. In the pre-Draft process, much was obviously made of Chet's frame and his -- him just being skinny, can he hold up in the NBA. Obviously number of us have seen the medicals that you guys have seen, but is that at all related to this, like his frame and being more susceptible to an injury like this?

SAM PRESTI: No, that's why I was saying it's an acute injury, you know what I mean. It's an impact injury. It's an acute injury.

I understand, there's a lot of first-level thinking going on out there on that kind of stuff. We can't really control that. It's a figment of the alternate reality that is the Internet. But that's not where reality resides, right. There's opinions and there are facts, and we are dealing with the facts.

The facts are everything I laid out earlier about the acute injury and the fact that it's extremely rare, and the

mechanism in which -- in how it happened.

Q. Talked about how Chet's year, and obviously I know it's all very tentative at this point but do you have a thought process in terms of him traveling, just how can he be engaged to try to maximize a rookie year that doesn't include playing and knowing these injuries have happened, what's the track record for players able to work on muscle mass and developing bodies and all that sort of thing?

SAM PRESTI: I think that's a great question. I don't think that I can answer specifically what he's going to be doing because we're really just working through the process right now and logistics.

I mean, he's already lifting. He can shoot, non-weightbearing. This guy, he lives and breathes basketball. That's one of the reasons why we wanted him so bad. And he's going to find ways to get better even without us. We're probably going to have to pull him back more than anything.

But that's something that Mark and I will talk about. Mark will do great with this. We'll have him engaged, and Chet will be a huge part of what we're doing.

But obviously his health comes first. If it doesn't benefit him to be on the road, then we can't let him go on the road. We have to make sure that everything is focused on getting him healthy. But he's already upper body lifting. You know, he's going to have to be non-weightbearing for a little bit. But then he'll get on the floor and he'll have a ball in his hands every day and we'll see where it takes us. But I can't give you anything specific.

There was a second part to your question?

Q. You hit on a lot of it but just in terms of how do you maximize, especially a rookie, everybody has had guys miss a year, but when you're a rookie, how do you try to maximize that time?

SAM PRESTI: That's something we'll think through but there's a lot in your rookie year that's coming at you that I actually think, you know, he's going to get to be able to take that in while rehabbing and developing. You know, from just getting the schedule, figuring that out, dealing with all the meetings and just the cadence of the NBA. And that's stuff that I've talked to Nick about, actually, a little bit and we'll get him involved as well.

As I said at the outside, there's a lot of guys that have missed their first year and have gone on to great years, and maybe part of it is because their assimilation is a little

bit different. I don't know. But we'll find a way to maximize it, and we'll be thoughtful about it and we'll get through it.

Q. I was curious how this might impact some roster decisions that you guys have upcoming with camp, if you may want to keep somebody like a Derrick Favors just because you're going to need guys to fill the center position, or if you were just going to continue on, business as usual with kind of some back end of roster.

SAM PRESTI: To be honest with you, we just haven't had a chance to kind of process that. The last few days have been really intense on getting the assessments, making sure we're with the right physicians, understanding the injury, understanding the long-term, you know, prognosis, making sure that we have all that lined up.

You know that, stuff, we'll sort that out, you know what I mean. We'll sort that out. Not to say it's not important, but we've got plenty of time until get there.

And you know, we'll figure it out. But we just -- I haven't -- I couldn't answer that right now.

Q. And are there examples, you seem positive on the long-term prognosis of his injury. Are there examples in the NBA or NFL that you draw that from specifically or is it his specific injury from a doctor's point of view?

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, I'm not a doctor, so I'm never going to come up here and pretend that I have that expertise.

The way I'm speaking to you is the way we're being spoken to. So you know what I mean, the injuries are very, very common in the NFL and people come back and play all the time and return to form. The basketball players have had these and have also done the same. So we can only work off of that information.

But you know, I'm not the authority, medical authority. But nothing we're hearing is telling us that there's anything beyond like a positive prognosis as long as it's -- as long as it's operated on.

Q. So you mentioned the Internet, and a lot of hopes have been put on Chet, even though he's a rookie. There's a lot of energy about him being here and a lot of, like I said, high hopes put on him. But without him, some fans will say, it's time to get another really high draft pick and they will look at it from that standpoint. What do you say to those people? Because that's a reality on the Internet and among fans that lose hope when a significant player goes down.

SAM PRESTI: Well, the first thing I say is like a major oxymoron, reality on Internet does not exist. It's an alternate world. It's like a play world.

But I would just say, look, I think our team has gotten better year after year, and the way we have built our team, or I should say repositioned team, is that it doesn't boil down to one particular game or one particular season; and we are on, as I said, a bit of a climb up a second mountain. There's going to be these types of setbacks. I think this one is, you know, the progress is a lot harder to see than the setback. The setback happens quickly. Like this is a quick thing.

But the amount of progress we've made in the off-season relative to the players that we've added, the improvement of a lot of our existing players, some of the things we learned last year, I mean, we're coming into the season I think an improved team.

My hope is that we'll be able to say that for the foreseeable future based on the way we reposition the team. If we can take some steps forward this year in areas that I think can be sustainable, not just optical but sustainable, then you can add Chet Holmgren to that team.

So I look at it as like I'm not trying to convince anybody because you can't -- if somebody has an irrational point of view, and they have gotten there through being irrational, I can't say anything that's going to help that. That's just the world they are going to live in.

We just have to focus on what we can control, and I think that we have a group of guys that will continually get better for quite a long time. But we're still scaling the mountain in the Western Conference, and we have to see where that goes. We come into every season the same way since 2008, which is we have to wait to see how the season unfolds.

I was reading a book the other day, like an investing book, and it basically said, there's a famous quote that says there's two types of investors: The ones that don't know, and the ones that don't know they don't know.

So I don't know the answer to that question. Like I don't know how the season will go, you know. And if anyone thinks they do, they are probably not right. So we have to see how it unfolds, and we've done that every year. And some years we've been surprised, and some years we've been disappointed, but that's the beauty of sports.

Q. For however long Chet is out in terms of 100 percent capacity to play, how much is that going to impede his development? This season was all about

finding out what kind of player he is, and getting better and those kinds of things. How much does that impede that and how much of that could still happen even though he's not cleared to play?

SAM PRESTI: I mean, that's -- you're asking my opinion. I can't give you like a specific -- my opinion is, I mean, Embiid, Simmons, Griffin, a like a lot of these players, these guys are bet getting better so quickly because from the ages that these guys entered the league, they have such a wide range of growth. They are getting better for eight, nine, ten years, especially with the way that guys are playing longer in today's NBA.

So I don't think that missing the first year is really going to change the outcome. I think it's more of an emotional response from a lot of people. I also think you can make the argument that in his case, he could be uniquely benefitted by the time.

It would be better if he was playing, no question. I think the thing that we will lose is just the interactivity with his teammates in terms of on the court. Like what works, what's working, things to try. Sure, we are going to lose that.

But I don't think he's going to be -- I don't think he's going to get to the end of his career in 15 years and go, geez, he would be better if he just had that first year back. I don't think that's going to happen.

He's going to get better just by getting stronger, just by seeing things differently, just by learning the NBA. All that's going to be happening. He's going to be able to shoot. He's going to be able to do a lot of things with the ball. It's just the on-court piece of the symmetry with the group.

But we have plenty to work on, not to discount Chet's role on the team because I think it's going to be vital and critical. But our team is so young and so new that we have plenty of things that we need to harness and work with and mold and learn about and observe.

And I'm really excited about that because I think -- I think there's work to do, you know what I mean, in a positive way. Chet will -- I don't think, will be behind in any way, especially because he's such a junkie, and he's so thoughtful about the game. His mind is going to be looking at things extremely deeply as he goes through the season.

And like I said, there's something positive that's going to come from this. It always happens that way. When we had the injury with Westbrook in the Houston series, that was a tough one, right. But we went to two Western

Conference Finals after that, and a part of that is just the way we rallied and the way we took that situation in.

I really think it's important, if you're going to be in the NBA, this is a business with a lot of chaos. So keep in your head and understanding, like don't be surprised by things that happen that don't go your way; that would be naïve. We have to have humility and gratitude about everything that happens to us, and I think that will bear itself out, and Chet's development will be benefitted in some way long term as a result.

Q. You messed, and you just referenced this again, you referenced how Chet has approached this. You said that the way he was made you think he's even more so the right guy for you. Can you just give us a little bit of insight? I'm sure there was vast disappointment to start, but what have you heard from him and what have you sensed from him in that regard?

SAM PRESTI: Well, I've spent a lot of time with him recently. How do I say this -- I mean, he wants to be really good. He cares a lot. And you know, he's all -- the thing I'm really impressed with is he's not an outside-in guy. He's not looking outside for his validation. He's not looking -- he's not looking to compare himself or -- I think his disappointment is not in what other people might think or say; it's in genuinely he loves basketball and he loves the team. Like he wants to be there for the team.

He's also highly intelligent, and he realizes that this is a setback, and now, we've got to get to work. And he's going to figure out all the -- he's very mature in this way, is I guess what I would say. He understands; he's disappointed -- of course he is. Especially he's never experienced an injury. You know, so this is a tough thing to not just be able to walk out on the court and play.

But his mind is: I'm going to work on what I can; I'm going to control what I can, and I'm going to get it done. You know, I just think there's a maturity to that, and there's an authenticity to his desire and his disappointment is coming from -- and it should be disappointing. It should hurt.

But it's coming from the right places. It's intrinsic. You know, it's intrinsic of who he is, and that's why I said to the fans, let him know you care. Because a lot of times, you know, players, great players, they get adulation for what they do. He hasn't done anything yet.

I think what makes playing here unique is people want to support the players because they are players. They are the Thunder players, whoever happens to be in that uniform. And, to feel that early on I think is going to be

even greater.

So I don't know, I think he's well-positioned to do a good job with it. There's going to be some tough times now, don't get me wrong, but he's got what it takes and he'll be ready when he's ready to come back. I think he'll be a force.

Thank you, guys, for jumping on quickly like that. Really appreciate it. When we have more information, you know, we'll let you know. But we thought it was important that once we had a clear handle on things that we would get in front of you here.

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