

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

Monday, September 26, 2022
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Coach Mark Daigneault Press Conference

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Welcome. We're excited, as I'm sure you guys are. Can't wait to get started here. Completed a really good off-season. It was a long off-season, longest off-season since I've been the head coach because of the COVID years.

I want to thank Mr. Bennett and Sam, first and foremost, for the resourcing we get in the off-season; developmental platforms for our players are important 12 months out of the year, and we just never fall short when it comes to the resources we get.

It allows us and the players to do our best work, and we're incredibly grateful for that, and I always feel the need to mention that at the start of the season every year.

I want to thank our staff, as well. Our staff is boots on the ground. Those are 12 month jobs. They're away from their families quite a bit with our players, again, just investing in the growth of our team, and I thought we got a lot done.

And that brings me to our players who I thought had a tremendous off-season. It was a 168-day off-season and we challenged them at the end of the year last year to maximize that and to be intentional about that, and I thought we did that in a lot of ways. So I'm very excited to see what the output of that as we start camp and we start the season.

I think a lot of guys got a lot better and did great work, really committed and disciplined. Can't wait to see how that turns out.

I'll take whatever questions you guys have.

Q. Has your opinion on what players do in the off-season to prepare changed, given some of the situations, like with Chet?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: No. They have to play. They have to play for a lot of reasons: Readiness, rhythm, improvement, confidence, especially when they get into different markets. We encourage them to do that,



especially after Summer League.

A lot of guys spent the early part of the summer in OKC, and then in the later part of the summer going out and playing against players on different teams. It heightens the competition, and it gives them -- like I said, it gives them humility in some cases, gives them confidence in other cases.

His particular injury was in an NBA-sanctioned event, and we encouraged these guys to go out there and play. You can't expect guys to go six months in the off-season, especially young players, without touching a ball or without feeling the juices of competition. It doesn't change my opinion at all.

Q. I've got two questions about Chet. First being what you saw in him in pre-draft and then in Summer League actually playing, and then second with him out for the year. What's your expectation of how he can learn and what he can learn about being an NBA player?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, so the pre-draft process I'm somewhat involved in, but so much work is done prior to my involvement by a lot of people, and they do great work. There's great meeting him in pre-draft, it was great meeting all these guys in pre-draft because it gives me a really good baseline when they come in.

The thing that stands out about him are his intangibles as a guy. He is a worker, he's fearless, he's got a motor. And as it relates to the injury, we have a holistic development program not only for injured players, but for all of our players.

We're developing their game, but they're also developing their body, they're developing their mind, they're developing their recovery methodologies, correctives, diet, psych. We try to have as holistic a program as possible.

And when you've got a guy that's hurt, obviously there's things he can't do on the court, and you can reallocate that time into other areas and hopefully strengthen other areas. Certainly not the path that we would prefer. We'd like him to be out here. But since he's not, we're certainly going to make a lot of investments, and the thing that makes me the most optimistic about that is the approach that he takes.



He's the secret ingredient, the guy going through that with a motor and with optimism is critical to not only getting healthy, but the player you are on the other side of it, are you stronger as a result, and I'm 100 percent confident that that'll be the case because of who he is, and it only makes me more excited that we picked him.

Q. What led to the decision to bring Chip in, and what makes a good shooting coach, and what kind of a difference can he make?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: The decision -- Sam worked with him and has known him for a long time, and so the connection relationally was between him and Sam. Sam and I sat down with him in Las Vegas in Summer League soon after he left San Antonio.

That was the first time I ever met him, but his reputation preceded him. We have a lot of people from that organization that speak very highly of him as a shooting coach.

But as I've started to work with him and the more I learn about him, he's got a pretty special set of intangibles as a person. He's incredibly positive, and he's a really good team player.

We think he'll be impactful not only in the shooting space but in other spaces, as well. He's going to be a unique role. He's not going to be with us full time. He's not going to be at every single game, but we are excited about adding him.

I also would be remiss if I didn't mention, like, adding somebody that you're hoping can have an impact from an external organization, that relies on having like a really tight-knit humble group of people, and our coaching staff is that and allows us to bring somebody like him in. Our organization is that, and it hews us to bring strong external people in.

I think if you do that without having a solid foundation in the organization and on your staff, then that can get out of control pretty quickly, and that's certainly not the case.

So it gives us confidence that we can bring people like Chip and some of the other people we've added in other spaces into the organization.

Q. What determines when he's here, when he's not, that kind of thing?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: We're going to work through it. He'll be here a good amount here early. But I mean, it's a

unique position, so we're learning as we go. We're not overplanning it. We're going to see how it evolves. But we're excited about it. We think it can be impactful.

Q. Another coaching question as it relates to Grant. What advice have you given him given you've gone through the same thing early in your career, and what was the biggest change from the G-League system to the NBA system for you?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, I think Grant coming here and Kam going to the Blue speaks to a larger philosophy organizationally. We're trying to develop our people, and we're trying to use all the platforms we can to develop our people.

There's a lot of advantages to developing people internally, and that's been an organizational staple for a long time.

We try to carry that into our coaching staff.

In this particular case, we can get development for Grant because he's never been in the NBA, and development for Kam because he's never been a head coach, and now you're boosting the strength of those guys, and three years from now they're both going to be better as a result of that, and that's what we're building our infrastructure just like we're building our team.

In terms of transition, he'll be fine. One of the things having the team here, he's worked with a lot of our players, he's coached Summer League. Our guys are very familiar with him. He'll hit the ground running. Kam will continue to be involved in training camp, and when he's around the team, and so we're just trying to make that as tight knit and integrated as we can.

Q. I know he's dealing with an injury, but Shai has done everything you guys have needed him to. Is there another level he can take, and if so, what are some things you're looking to see out of him when he gets back on the court?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: There's certainly another level because of how he works. His regimen in the summer is impressive, and it's no surprise that he comes back better every year. It's he and Dort, these guys are experienced players, but they're still developing players. They're still young players. He's just going to start scraping the beginning of his prime, which is exciting to think about.

His body looks great. He's put a lot of work into his body. His game looks great.

I'm really excited about him, and I'm not going to



necessarily project what that's going to look like, but I'm excited about it because I know the work he puts in and how driven he is and it's certainly a tone setter for the rest of the team. I think the younger guys especially coming into the program or that have been here, when you watch how he approaches an off-season, it's a pace setter, and that has a powerful impact on our environment.

Q. You mentioned this is the longest off-season since you've been here, and Sam mentioned that it's good for development. Obviously you don't have anything to compare it to, but what's the benefit as a coach?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Of a long off-season? The age of our team, the stage that our team is in, guys can improve very quickly because the learning curve is steep early in your career. It smooths as you get older and older.

Even our rookies, we drafted them about three months ago, and guys can make progress physically. They can make progress mentally. They can make progress basketball-wise.

So then when you scale that over the length of an off-season, the amount of time that you can invest -- I'm expecting -- I don't know what exactly we're going to see in training camp, but I'm expecting to see guys look different in a positive way. That's exciting.

It also -- I think this is the first year where it's allowed us to really develop strong relationships with our guys at a pace that isn't rushed. The first two years, the first year, we turned around, started in December, and then last year was a pretty tight window. We had Summer League in August.

That also helped us, I think, all the way around. It's got everybody feeling really excited as we get going here.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Jaylin. It seems like as we've seen him and learned a little bit more about him, seems like he might be a day one ready-to-contribute type of guy. Do you think that, and if so, why?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: We'll see. I think he looked great in Summer League, obviously, but Summer League is not always the best predictor of NBA regular season. Things amp up competitively in camp and then they amp up in the preseason and they amp up in the regular season. Where they start is a starting point, not an end point.

We'll see how he competes in camp. We have a competitive team. We have a lot of guys. We have more than 17 guys now that we're pretty invested in, that we've been around, that we like, that we think bring strength to

the team. He's certainly one of them, and we're going to throw that out there and see what happens.

Before I make any predictions about him or anybody else, I'm really just trying to stay very open. With like I said, the length of the off-season, it affords us the opportunity to take a step back and see what we've got because I think some guys could look different.

Q. What are the challenges of coaching two guys with the exact same name coming in at the exact same time, and when you drafted the second one, did you turn to Sam and say, what the heck are you doing?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I had a pretty good feeling they were going to draft the second one. They loved Jaylin Williams in the process early, from Arkansas. We'll figure it out. I'm big on eye contact when I call them in the game. There's some guys I turn and look at them and they know what that means, so it might turn into that.

Q. With Giddey, how much emphasis is improving shooting percentages? Is that the biggest part of his development going forward right now? Or is it more than that?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's holistic, like I mentioned with the Chet question. Especially with somebody as young as he is. We're not going to put all of our eggs in one basket with any player developmentally. We're trying to develop the whole person.

It's important to note that he's been a very impactful player for a long time with his existing shooting skill. He gets to places on the floor. He's able to draw defense. He's been able to navigate his game with his existing shooting skill.

That being said, he's worked really hard at it, and I think he's better, just watching him from the summer. He's gained confidence. He's more consistent.

But I do think in-game shooting numbers are a tricky measure when it comes to shooting. If you look at anybody's career, look at a veteran player and look at their three-point numbers over the course of their career, and there's a lot of variance there and there's a lot of factors that contribute to it.

So I would be careful not to jump out the window one way or the other, if he starts off really well. Sample size is small. We're really playing the long game. He's working hard at it, we're working hard at it, not only with him but with all the guys, and we're really confident it's going to continue to improve.

Q. What do you need from Shai this season? Like do you need him to be an All-Star, or do you need him to average a certain number of points? What do you need from him in terms of how he impacts the game and how he impacts the other guys?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Shai has a pretty transcendent impact on the environment. I think it's a unique position for someone that's 25, and he's had it now for -- this is going on his third year where he's kind of been the guy. He's been one of the guys.

That comes with a lot of responsibility, and one that he embraces.

That's what I give him a lot of credit for. He wants the responsibility of having the type of impact on the environment that he does, and he does that with his drive. He does that with his commitment. He does that with kind of his ethos and his energy. He's got a very positive, light energy to him that bodes really well in a long six-month, 82-game season.

I think as time has gone on -- he's always kind of had that. That's always existed. He's become more and more intentional with it from a leadership standpoint.

Leadership is hard. People think leadership is this glamorous thing. Leadership is invisible, and a lot of it is burdensome. It takes time to learn how to do it. It takes time to find your own voice in it. He's been on that path to this point and he's only continued that path. He's done a great job with the team in the off-season.

I'm less of like what we need from him in that area, I'm more excited to see how he continues to evolve there.

He's pretty self-motivated in that area, so we're not leaning on him really hard. He's doing that on his own.

Q. Last year you talked at a couple different junctures about experimentation, maybe doing things that aren't sort of the norm in the NBA. What did you learn from some of those things last year, and what's your expectation for the level of experimentation you'll throw out this year throughout the season?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, I think when you listen to Sam talk about team building and talk about where we're at, we're not interested in average. Being conventional leads you to average. It puts you in the middle of the herd.

I think we've had a willingness from a strategic standpoint and a team-building standpoint to chase excellence, and sometimes risk failure in the process.

I think developmentally with our players and with how we coach the team and things we do, I think to align with that philosophy we have to be willing to do things a little bit differently, and we're not afraid to do that in pursuit of excellence.

We experimented with a lot of things. We looked at a lot of things last year. We'll continue to do that, because it's a competitive league, and if you just settle into the middle, then you're just going to be in the middle. We're not interested in that.

We're aggressive in our pursuit of our goals, and if we fail and fall on our face sometimes, that's the cost of doing business.

Q. I don't know if you've been asked this so I apologize, but with Chet's injury, kind of like a redshirt year, all rookies got to get bigger, stronger, what can he do from a weight training standpoint? Are there things he can do to get bigger and stronger in this year off?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah. I mean, like I said, he's going to be able to reallocate his time. He's not going to be playing games, which is a huge amount of your time in the season.

So he's going to be able to reallocate that time, not only in the weight room but in a holistic way. As good of a player as he is and as excited as we are about him, he's an unfinished product. He's got a long way to go in a lot of different areas. He knows that. It's part of the reason why we love him.

He's going to invest in those areas and set himself as far apart as he can for when the ball is back in his hands.

Q. On Chet's injury, what kind of ways can he get better without playing, especially with the mental reps and the film room? How does Mike Muscala and Derrick Favors play a role in that?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: We have a plan where he'll be rotating through our program, watching film, learning the league, game planning. He's already on track to be cutting his own film, watching his own film. He's a junkie, and he'll be able to pour that energy into that.

He's going to be around the team, obviously. He's going to learn as much as he can. I think that's a huge benefit to the year. But more so than the weight room, I think one of the major benefits to the year is every single player in the NBA, a skill is how you manage setbacks and how you

manage adversity, because they're coming, and the better player you are -- you talk about Shai.

Shai is going to deal with more adversity than anybody. That's part of being a really good player.

If Chet wants to be a really good player, which he wants to be and we want him to be, that's a learned skill. This year is going to test that. He's going to have to watch the team walk out into practice tomorrow and he's going to have to have to watch the team go out of the tunnel for the first game, and that's going to test his mettle, and that's a good thing. It'll sharpen his blade and he's got the type of approach that is very easy to bet on in that type of a situation.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.