

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Shai Gilgeous-Alexander

Press Conference



Q. Shai, obviously a lot of ups and downs, highs and lows this season, but overall talk about this year as a whole. What do you think you're most proud of with this group?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, the relationships I think I've built, I think we've built throughout the season have been great. Obviously it's a business, and you have guys that are beside you like that you can tell they have your best interests, and it's like a family.

It kind of takes the business side out of it, and it's easy to keep it just the game you love. I think you enjoy the season and you enjoy the travel and all the stuff that doesn't make it fun a little bit more, and it makes everything better.

Q. We can see the connectedness of the group on the floor, but what made this group so tight knit off the floor, too?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Honestly, I think we're a bunch of kids, to be honest. We're all around the same age. We like to do the same thing. Kind of have the same interests. Kind of like a college team. I think because of that, it allowed us to take strides this year.

Q. How are you feeling physically today after the eye, and emotionally now that -- I know you haven't even had 24 hours to reflect, but how are you feeling mentally about where things stand right now?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Physically I feel good. Might not look good, but I feel good.

Yeah, I haven't even really soaked it all in, but yeah, it's been a heck of a year, a fun year. It went by fast, as usual. It was fun.

Q. I think the sense is that you guys saw progress like we ended up seeing, but what gave you that feeling before the end of the year, and what do you feel like pushed you guys ahead where you could finish the

year? If you guys had the belief before the year you could win 40, you could make the play-in, be in contention for a playoff, why did you think that, and what ultimately pushed you guys to the point where you were able to do those things?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Honestly, at the beginning of the season, I don't think we set like a for sure, like a marker or a goal. We tried not to listen to people's expectations and tried not to also set our own. We tried to just take it day by day. We tried to just enjoy the process and tried to make the most out of the process, and I think we knew if we did those two things, we would leave with the results no matter what.

We'll live with these results for sure.

Q. Was there a particular point in the season -- you guys played Boston and almost beat them there. Was there any point in the season where you said, hey, there's something this group can do that was maybe was better than what on the outside --

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, I think -- personally I kind of felt that the first couple times we came together. I could feel guys got better in the summer and the pieces that we had were really going to help. The rookies were really good this year, as you guys know.

But yeah, we have a group of guys that work super hard and is going to continue to get better, and as a whole we should get better because of it.

Q. What does it mean to you to have a front office that preaches patience and stability and you have this young group that theoretically could grow together through time and kind of being the leader of that group? What does that mean to you?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, I think the most impressive part is they really put the ball in our court. They stress to us that there's certain things that you do to get to goals that we want to get to, championships, et cetera, but it's up to us to do so.

It's how hard we work in the summertime, how hard we work in the season, how hard we work on the relationships together, how hard we work to have team dinners, how

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hard we really try to make it work that control all that.

We know that, and that's one of the things we try to hang our hat on is controlling our own narrative.

Q. What did you guys see from Josh this year? He made a pretty big leap from year one to year two; had a triple-double against the Pelicans. What did you see from him this year overall?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, he, one, got better. The first time I saw Josh play again after last year I could see he got better, more confident in his game, added more to his game.

Then he continued -- he got a lot better as the season went on, and I think that's very impressive. A lot of guys, like you get better in the season and then you come back and you're a new guy and then teams figure you out and you're a little bit stagnant.

But for him to get better throughout the whole season and continue to improve his game is very impressive, and right now he is a world better than he was in the summertime and the year before, and I hope -- and I'm pretty sure he will continue that growth because he works hard and has the right mentality.

Q. The off-season, you seem to come back and have something new in your game. You've talked a lot about how much work you put in in the off-season. Do you have kind of a specific thing that you went to work on or sort of add to your game coming into next year?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, I try to get better at everything. I try to be the most complete basketball player I can be.

But as of right now, I'm not even there yet. There's some things I know that I can feel to work on, but I'll go home, chill for a bit, and then attack the program with a couple of my skills coaches and then go to work.

But yeah, I should be better by next year, too.

Q. You're planning on playing for Team Canada this summer?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Correct.

Q. What do you think of the squad you guys have?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, should be fun. As far as I know who's playing, it should be fun. Should be competitive. We should have a good shot to win.

Q. You're likely going to make all-NBA first team. You're getting top 5 MVP votes, most improved player. These are goals that you might have had for yourself. What do you think of the accolades that you're receiving?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, they're nice. They're nice. But I think what I've figured out, and it's taken me a little bit, I think it takes most young guys a little bit to figure out, is none of that stuff matters without your team.

I know it sounds cliché, but I've -- for the past couple years now thought I've been a pretty good basketball player, and I can remember a lot of games this year where we won as a team, and you can see it in our record we're a completely better team and a lot better team.

All that stuff just happens to follow the year that we're a better team. I don't think it's a coincidence. I think to get stuff done individually and as a team, it takes a whole group.

Q. How would you compare the play-in situation you were just in with the playoff experience that you've had? What's the difference between the two?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: The play-in kind of felt a little bit like March Madness, just because it was like one game, play a team, you scout one game, and then loser go home. As opposed to like a series, you plan to at least play four games and then you adjust and stuff, and it's more like chess and you go back and forth.

But yeah, it was a new experience. It was fun for sure.

Q. No matter how anybody tries to shape your season this year, it's up there with some of the best seasons in NBA history with some of the best players in the NBA. Have you thought about -- sat back and thought about how great of a season you had? I know you mentioned how you did as a team, but have you thought about, wow, my name is up there with Michael Jordan who people consider the best player of all time, Dwyane Wade, who just got into Hall of Fame?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, honestly I haven't. I think like this year especially, I tried to -- not to say those things are distractions, but I tried to limit like external, I guess you could say like energy.

You find out about those things on social media, and I tried to stay away from that and just focusing on being the best player and being the best leader and being the best

teammate for this group and trying to win the most basketball games that we could.

That's where my head, my heart, everything about me has been, and that's what I've focused on. Honestly I haven't even -- I can hear it but I haven't focused on it or looked it up or compared it or anything like that.

Q. Do you think playing for Team Canada last summer helped you come into the season a little bit more prepared?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: It's a great question. Absolutely. It's funny because I kind of noticed like a trend of like players who play FIBA basketball go into the next season a little bit sharper, and I think it has to do with in the summertime if you're not playing until June, you go four months without playing real basketball with refs and you can't foul every possession.

You play real basketball, and I think that gives you -- and the timing of FIBA basketball kind of gives guys some real action before they go into the season, and I felt a little bit sharper, a little bit more ready for sure.

Q. You were talking about how you filter out the noise and all that stuff. I know how hard it is for the average person to filter out noise. You got however many million people coming at you. How hard is it, and what's your mechanism for really filtering out all that extra noise?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, really plug into my loved ones, that's what I do. Whether it's my teammates, whether it's my girlfriend, whether it's my mom, my family. Especially like my family, my girlfriend. They're like -- they know me outside of basketball and before basketball, so they kind of like keep me grounded, and they're like my getaway. So I use them.

Q. You talked about doing this as a team. One of the things that you really brought to this team at a different level was your defense. What do you credit that step up in defense to for you?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I believe a lot of defenses is want-to. I wanted to be a better defender. The best players to ever play are that -- they play defense, and they're as good at that end, and that's ultimately what I want to be, is one of the best who ever played. Just like the guys you named, Michael, Dwyane Wade, all those guys played both ends and won because of it, and that's what I'm trying to do.

Q. As you guys took strides this year as a team, what

did you learn about Mark and where he is as a coach and what he brought to this group?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I didn't learn nothing. I knew what type of coach he was his first year here. He has a core belief system, and I 100 percent agree with it. I think it's the right way to go about the game.

I think him instilling those things in us when we were a 15-win team to when we were a 22-win team until now has made it easier for us to grow because it's instilled in us habits that we carry forward, and I think he's done a great job of that.

I think he doesn't waver; his temperament, his attention to detail, his approach to every day doesn't change because we win, lose or draw. You can't draw in basketball, but it doesn't change whether we win or lose. I think he's one heck of a coach. He's on his way.

Q. You guys are a young team that had to learn on the fly, but Mark was also a young coach that had to learn on the fly the. Is there any area of growth that you've seen in him or the biggest area of growth that you've seen in him?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Biggest area of growth? I'm not too sure. I'm not too sure. I don't know if it's any certain area, but I will go back to say I'm really impressed with his demeanor in pressure situations, easy situations. He never wavers. With a head coach that never wavers it makes it easy for the rest of the group, too.

Q. In his tenure he's seemed like a defensive coach, but this year the offense took a huge step. What was that process like for you guys especially schematically? Cutting seemed like it opened up your game a lot more. Just for the offense specifically, how was that process for you guys with Mark?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, we like to hang our hat defensively. We know it wins games. We could all feel that offense was an issue in the past. I think we've gotten a lot better at it because of some of the things that were implemented for sure.

Every summer we as players, we kind of split going one way, come back together, do whatever we do, and try to get better as basketball players. I think our coaches try to do the same thing, and I think they've done so for sure. They came back this year, had some new stuff they implemented.

We're obviously seeing the results, and they got better this summer, as well.

Q. What have you learned this year about Chet, both on and off the court, and what he might give you guys next year?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Off the court, he's a really good kid. He's goofy. Easy to get along with. Bad at cards.

Q. Do you take advantage of that?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Not at all. I would never. (Laughter.)

Then on the court, competitor. The kid wants to be good. I think that's the biggest thing. Like he wants to be really good and he wants to prove himself to the world. That fire in him is impressive. It's impressive. I think because of that he's going to be a heck of a basketball player.

Q. With all the accolades coming his way, obviously you with the All-Star Game, Mark is a finalist for Coach of the Year, Jalen finalist for Rookie of the Year. As a leader, how do you keep up with all the success, how do you keep it from going to you guys' head?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: We've gotten a lot better, and just continue to do the same things. Stay inside the building, focus on what we need to focus on, individually and as a team.

We got better, but we're not perfect because there's a lot of things we can still get better at. Try to keep our strengths our strengths and try to make our weaknesses turn into our strengths.

I think if we just focus on ourselves and prioritize winning basketball games, it'll take care of itself.

Q. What are some extracurricular goals that you have, like fashion, business? Are there any extracurricular goals? And if so, what are they?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I'm honestly not too sure. I'm so invested in basketball like every day, 365 days a year. I don't really know what my life is going to look like when it's done.

Like me and my people talk about it all the time. I don't know and it's kind of scary, but I'll figure it out and cross that bridge when it gets there.

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