

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Jalen Williams

Press Conference



Q. I know we're only a few hours removed, but have you been able to just reflect on the past couple of games and what all of that whole experience was like for you?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I'm going to be real. A little bit. I think on the plane I was able to reflect a little bit. Just I think my pathway to getting in not so much the last couple games, I don't know if it felt long to everybody else, but just me, it just went by incredibly fast.

Just around this time last year I was preparing to obviously get into the NBA. Yeah, just kind of reflected on that and being grateful for kind of the stuff that went into doing that.

Yeah, I'll probably reflect a little bit more on the past couple games after I get some sleep.

Q. For you guys as a whole, as a team, you guys have made a lot of strides this season, as well. Looking back to the start of the season, I know you were probably taking in a lot at that point, but to where you are now, where do you think you've grown the most as a group?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think in short, we just trusted each other way more. Being young, early on you don't know where people are going to be at, or just like little nuances of kind of where everybody is going to be at and how each other play.

I think as the season went on we've really learned to trust each other and kind of play within each other. I know for me, I've learned what guys are good at and where I like to be on the floor and kind of where everybody else is going to be and just trusting each other in that way.

I think we've done a good job of that, especially down the stretch. We showed great flashes of stuff that we can do. Kind of looking forward to enhancing that during the summer.

Q. A lot of rookies kind of slow down toward the end

of the year, a lot of games. You seemed to just kind of continue to improve as the year went on. What do you attribute that to?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think a lot of the organization. In short, I'm just -- you kind of forget that it's a business here just because of how family oriented and I think everybody here wants you to succeed. So being open and talking about what hurts, from medical staff or what I need to improve on with the coaches or kind of just stuff like that, or having somebody to be able to talk to here, things of that nature, just being comfortable I think kind of attributed to me figuring out my path in that way.

Even in the weight room, figuring out what works for me to get my body right to be able to play and do that. Because like you say, college you play 30 games; that's your season. My sophomore year we played like 12 or 13 of them. So to go out and play -- I think I played like 76 or 77 games.

To do that, yeah, just kind of attribute that to the organization, just for me being comfortable kind of coming here and use the resources that they kind of put out. That's what I would attribute it to.

Q. What feel did you have for the Thunder before you got here, and then how did that change?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think, yeah, just being family oriented. I think it's a togetherness that I think even past the Thunder, just in Oklahoma that there is. People lined up at the gates yesterday at 4:00 a.m. when we got in. Like I don't think a lot of places are doing that.

I don't even think it's changed from when I got here and did the interviews until now. It's the same vibe, if not enhanced. Yeah, I think that just shows how open it's been, that there is no change.

I can't speak for other organizations, but it definitely could have been somewhere where you go and you talk and it might be one thing, then you get here and it's completely different. But it's been the same in my however many months it's been.

Q. When you were drafted, did you expect to be -- I know you're a confident guy, but did you expect to be

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a Rookie of the Year candidate?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I wasn't too really concerned with obviously like the accolades that go into it. I think I'm that caliber of a player, regardless of -- like I said, I feel like there's doubts in every person's head. Coming from a small school it's like you can go on Twitter and everybody is kind of like, oh, why did they get him or what is he kind of doing or everybody was kind of skeptical.

So there's self-doubt that creeps into that. I didn't really doubt my confidence going into that. It wasn't like I was going in thinking I wanted to be Rookie of the Year. It was more just I wanted to be able to be in a different position than what I was in when I started, and I thought I've been able to do that.

I didn't want to plateau middle of the year and kind of stay the same throughout that, and like I said, I thought I did a good job of that, as well, constantly improving and attacking the program, and I thought I've done a good job up until that point. Kind of ready to do the same thing for the summer. For the summer and get better in that regard.

Q. On the team or within the organization, outside of Shai, who is your biggest influence, mentor, to get you to where you are now, so comfortable?

JALEN WILLIAMS: You said outside of the team?

Q. Outside of Shai.

JALEN WILLIAMS: Ooh, that's a good question. This is going to have mixed emotions depending on who I say. I'm going to say K-Rich, though, I think just being an older vet. There's a lot of stuff. He's kind of been in the league the longest on our team. I think it's just how he carries himself on and off the floor.

Obviously him being hurt and still being kind of our motor speaks to what he means to our team. I thought he's done a good job of just helping me along the way, especially not hitting that kind of like, quote-unquote, rookie wall, kind of showing me the ropes of taking care of my body, kind of what he does to prepare and how he gets into his mental zone to be able to go out and play a certain amount of games.

Obviously 82 games is a lot and it's easy for the human mind to be like, I'm going to take this game off or this play off. I thought he did a good job with that, just kind of helping me out and figuring out different ways to get in my zone to figure myself out.

Q. Non-basketball related. What are some plans that

you have for the off-season, some hobbies that you do? Anything special planned?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I'm going to go to sleep for as long as possible. (Laughter.)

Outside of that, I think just spend time with my family. I think being in the NBA I've learned that you're gone for so long that you kind of take a lot of the moments that I was with them for granted.

So yeah, just going home, honestly, sleep, chill with the fam. Probably go see some movies. I haven't been able to do that, and I like going out and seeing movies. I'm excited to see Guardians of the Galaxy, chilling out for real, and just sleeping.

That's my answer for sure.

Q. What are your draft thoughts on Santa Clara's Brandon Podziemski?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, he had a great year. Definitely have been in contact with him, just trying to tell him different ways to kind of stay ready during this process and for him to kind of understand the biggest thing is this process doesn't stop until obviously our season is over.

So yeah, I wish him nothing but the best and I'll be in his ear through the whole draft process. He knows he can reach out to me whenever, but he had a legendary career out there, literally in his only year there he had a great season. Took his team and they played really well.

I'm excited for him and his journey. He knows he can reach out, and I'm looking forward to that for sure.

Q. What are some things you want to work on or improve on in the off-season?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I think picking my spots better. Obviously when you're playing in so many different positions, I think next year I'll have obviously a better clue than I did now of where I'm going to be at and things like that. I wanted to obviously increase my three-point percentage. I think that's just the way the game is evolving. That's something that can always get better.

Kind of just -- I think defensively I want to be kind of watch what Lu does a lot more and kind of be that secondary or help him out in that way, and I've gotten a lot of experience to be able to guard different types of players this year. So kind of taking that and I want to improve on that.

I would say probably my 3 ball, getting to the rim, learning



how to draw more fouls and get to the free-throw line a little bit more, and kind of go from there.

Q. You referred to versatility, both offense and defense. Did you know you had that in you before this --

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah.

Q. You knew the things that were asked of you, you knew you were capable before you had to do it?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah. Props to the Thunder. That's something that wasn't like a shock. I wasn't going into training camp and they were like, oh, this is going to happen. It was something that they had talked about, asked me if I was comfortable with it. Obviously the right answer is yes.

Yeah, just going out there and competing. I think that takes up every mistake that you can possibly make just going out there and playing hard.

But yeah, that's just the confidence that I had in myself, and it helps when the coaching staff and organization has confidence in you to do that, as well.

Q. You sort of said that hopefully you won't have to do as much of that next year. Is that something you'd prefer to be, more of a streamlined role?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Not really. Being versatile keeps you on the floor for sure. That's not something that I shy away from, it's something that I embrace. Obviously having Chet will definitely, like I said, clean that up.

Obviously Poku will be back, as well. We'll definitely have some bigs to keep me out of those situations with the 4 and the 5, but I think that makes me even more versatile, because when we do have those rotations we can always go small and do that, so I'm looking forward to being placed around in different positions.

Q. Small sample size, but what did you learn about playing postseason basketball versus the regular season and what you can take from that going forward?

JALEN WILLIAMS: It's definitely a lot more physical. That was something that was exciting and fun to be a part of. I think just the atmosphere. We didn't have any home games here, but you could just kind of tell the buzz from here and then obviously in New Orleans, for example, like going out there and I mentioned it before, just seeing like the red shirts on the seats before the game and seeing

how fast the seats filled up.

Usually people come in and there's still people coming in the first quarter, to it being a sold-out crowd. It's loud. Regular buckets are louder than what they usually are. And Minnesota the same way. Their people were cheering during lay-up lines.

It was fun. Definitely something, playing through adversity and coming together with all five and like I say, us being the youngest team in the NBA, I think that experience will definitely catapult us forward.

But obviously next year you can't take any of the wins and stuff like that going forward.

Definitely take the experience. I thought that was really good for us.

Q. Full season with Mark now. Everybody has said that he's a player's coach. Do you agree with that? What are your overall thoughts being coached by Mark?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, he's definitely a player's coach for sure. I've loved it. I think just how open he is with me and kind of where he sees me I think is genuine. That's not something that every coach has.

I think for a coach to have a certain relationship with every player is rare, and I think he's done a really good job of that. I think he's been able to really help us be a young team. It's hard to coach a young team, and I think he's done a really good job of that.

He's been able to relate to it. Kind of just lets us do our thing. Kind of gives us guidance along the way, and I think that's kind of been the best thing for us, so I'm excited for year two with him.

Q. Pretty early in the season you quickly became a fan favorite amongst the team and you've had some unique interactions online. I wanted to ask about your perspective on the unique dynamics of you and the fan base. Because you see all the stuff where you're translating Shai's Instagram to memes and all types of stuff like that?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah, that's just something I used to do in college. COVID you get bored, so I was just doing all kinds of stuff with the memes. I don't know how the Shai thing started. I think we were just joking about it in the locker room because he was explaining it, and then I honestly -- the season is a blur, but I remember going through and like translating it one time and I'm looking at

my phone blow up. I'm on SportsCenter for translating it, just stuff like that.

And then, like I said, OKC, the fan base has been super embracing. I've loved every step of that. Just going out, like people are super nice. We travel well on the road, too. So it's good to have some life out here and kind of just interact with people and kind of show them that we're not above anything else and we're all on the same level.

It's cool to be able to come out here and interact with them.

Q. How has puppy training been going?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Absolutely horrible. He does whatever he wants. He's his own guy. He has some training coming up in June so we'll get him right, but right now he runs the house.

Q. Are you kind of tired of the Jalen Williams/Jaylin Williams jokes?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah. I think we just haven't been on TV enough, so we'll probably work to change that, but everybody when they hear it the first time it ends up being the broadcast joke for the whole time. It doesn't bother me too much. I think that's just something that me and J-Will can laugh at. But it does happen a lot, yeah.

Q. Auburn has a decent prospect named Jaylin Williams. Thumbs up or thumbs down on...

JALEN WILLIAMS: That's beyond my pay grade. It would be funny to have three of us. I don't know if that's ever been done. I don't know if there's been two people with the same name, so three would be pretty funny.

Q. Video of you singing Michael Jackson went semi-viral. Are you a big Michael Jackson fan?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I am, and I hate that that's on the internet. I think I put it out there, though. My friend posted it for my birthday, yeah. Yeah, funny video. That was when my hair wasn't like all wild. That was when I could still pick through it.

Q. Do you have a favorite song?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Michael Jackson?

Q. Or album?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Ooh, I'm going to say Remember the Time is probably my favorite song.

Q. Plans for your YouTube channel this summer?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Yeah. Do a lot of like obviously workouts, kind of take in like a day in the life of obviously summer. That's something I don't think people see a lot. Kind of just what I do. I feel like everybody is pretty interested in what I'm doing when I'm not sleeping, so trying to do that.

Like I said, I'll take a ^ Bean with me on the road, too, and go home. Probably get my parents in some of the videos. Everybody is super interested in my brother, as well, right now, just kind of his popularity and how it's growing and the fact that I tweet about him every day.

Yeah, I'll probably get him in a couple videos and just kind of go from there, see what everybody wants. Yeah, right now I'm trying to figure out when I'm going to go home and do all that.

Q. Tre Mann said that he thinks Drake writes some of Shai's Instagram captions. What's your stance on that?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I second that. We talked about it. I definitely agree with Tre. I definitely think somebody is helping him. I don't know if it's Drake, but Shai knows a lot of people, so I would not be too shocked if it was Drake.

But I think he has a ghost writer.

Q. Speaking of the hair, I remember we asked you halfway through the season what your direction was with your hair and you weren't sure. Do you got any clarity on that? Are you going to braid it up? Dread up?

JALEN WILLIAMS: I want to braid it, but I might just go bald. If I'm going to be in Arizona that long it's going to get hot. Yeah, I don't know. I hope that didn't give you any clarity.

Q. What would it take for you to sing on the internet again?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Probably not much. I reposted it, so yeah.

Q. Obviously Shai got to play against Nickeil. Have you thought about how cool that would be for you and Cody to play against each other in the NBA?

JALEN WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah, sure. I don't really bring it up too much because he has a lot of stuff going on. That's added pressure from his brother that he probably doesn't

need or probably hears every day.

That would definitely be cool. That's probably something he thinks about a lot, something I think about. That's a pretty rare occurrence for that to happen. We're like right in the range of age where we missed each other in high school, so that would definitely be a pretty cool full-circle moment.

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