

# Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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## Sam Presti

## Acie Law

### Press Conference



SAM PRESTI: Thanks for waiting for us to get everything completed. I think everybody knows that the trade that we made was not completed yet so we can't talk too much about that. But we can talk about the players we drafted. Feel free to ask questions.

I wanted to start really quickly and turn it over to Acie to talk about the guys. When thinking about this draft, in general, it brought me back to when I was growing up in Boston, the morning after the draft when I was a kid, I used to love opening up -- feel it in my hands, and seeing kind of how the draft went. Just thinking about the fact that different Celtics players, I remember when Fox was drafted, the fact that these guys go from college to the pros and tonight, with the guys that we drafted were fans from those college programs that will follow these guys and there are kids in Oklahoma city that are going to know new players. That's the thing in the draft, who is my new pro team, and that happens all across the country and I want to start with that.

We are extremely excited to have Cason and Keyontae join the team. As I said, Acie will break them both down as players. I think we talked all the time about the fact that we are observing the players, until we get to a point where we have to select them. That's a big part of the process but the biggest part of the process is the development process which is something that now has to start and for the guys that we selected last year, they have been through one year of development and are entering the second.

This is our third draft since we started to pivot the team and make this transition, and we are really thrilled with the way it went but we still have so much work front of us. So we are not close to feeling like we are putting the final touches on the team. This is one point in the timeline. We have more work to do, obviously, a lot more decisions to make, more things we need to continue to observe and watch, and we are excited about that.

I do think one thing that we have to recognize is that as we

saw, the team has sent us signals over the last year that when we have these two-way playmaker types, the performance of the team is really good and then the development of our players really gets amplified. So that was some of the thinking with Cason and in addition to a lot of the intangible aspects that he brings to the table.

Again, we are slowly building a foundation that we can continue to work on and I'll turn it over to Acie and he can talk about the players.

ACIE LAW: As you guys know, tonight is a real exciting night. A lot of work goes building up to this process and we feel like we are able to get two guys that will make the community proud. They fit with what we are trying to build. Cason is a two-way player, smart, tough, resilient. Great human being. Comes from a great family. Keyontae is as resilient as they come. Had a great season. Tough two-way player again. We are excited to get both of those guys in and feel like they are going to contribute to what we are trying to build.

**Q. Did you go for the best player available or were you thinking about need at all or just best player available?**

SAM PRESTI: For us, I would say we are always looking for the best player for the Thunder. So who is the best fit for the organization. And we're not really, like I said before, we are not trying to -- we are not trying to build out the perfect depth chart or the perfect roster because as I said earlier, this is the third draft that we've had and there's going to be a lot more decisions that will be made over the course of time.

So really looking for certain characteristic, probably, above everything. And as I said for Cason, as Acie said, he's a two-way guy and he's got great attribute physically, great length, physical in general. We just feel like he complements the group that we have and it's reflected in the type of players we've had success with.

But yeah, you know, that's what makes him a good fit for us in terms of on the court, off the court, he's I think consistent with the type of people that we are always trying to associate ourselves with, and really stood out that way as well.

**Q. With Keyontae, I understand, you guys vet those**

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**guys seriously, seriously, but with a guy who has had a medical condition, is it different at all?**

SAM PRESTI: In this particular case, the league is really the body that approves that. We were obviously very comfortable with all the information and the last week, you know, really, are the people that are saying he's able to be drafted. But we didn't really have any concerns with that. We have seen all the information, the league's seen all the information. So you know, you're careful with every player but we feel really good about it.

**Q. A lot of times, guys when they are older -- drafting Keyontae --**

SAM PRESTI: You want to talk about that?

ACIE LAW: Keyontae is a player we feel can contribute right away. That helps him, his experience and the resiliency that he's shown and his talent. We feel like that's a player that can come in, and obviously want to get him here and get him to work and we feel like that's a player that can help us.

**Q. You talked about wanting this team to be physical. Was that a big part of drafting Wallace?**

SAM PRESTI: That's a component. I wouldn't boil it down to one thing. I just think the way he plays both ends of the floor, super important. His defensive metrics are like pretty impressive. His finishing is impressive. I just think he's a really solid player across the board. And he has a knack for being in the middle of things.

Now, with all that being said, he's still a young player. Our team is more established than it was a year ago. And he, like every player, is just getting started in terms of their developmental journey.

So first thing for us is when we are able to get him with us, which will be once the trade is able to be executed, we have to get a baseline for where he is, understand, you know, where we need to start with him and we start that process just like we did last year with the guys we drafted at this time last year. Those guys are only going into their second -- really, their first summer, real summer with us, because the first one is a little tricky when coming off the draft. And it's a long rode ahead.

So we are excited. We are excited about it. He brings a lot of different things but he's got to start from the same place all the guys have for the last 15 years.

**Q. How exciting is it to add a player to the Thunder who can share the ball a lot?**

SAM PRESTI: That's one of the things about our play style. When you are studying the players, you're also thinking about the fact that, you know, there's a lot of different -- it's hard to find players in the first place. You just look at the numbers, you know what I mean, how rare it is to find players in the draft that are successful.

Then you have to think about all the different things that could get in their way of finding success. I think in this particular case, our play style really helps us because we can get -- we have a lot of flexible players. They can play within this infrastructure that's been created in the market and the coaches have done a really good job instilling.

And we feel like Cason can just function extremely well because he's so well rounded with the existing guys that we have, and not have to play in one specific place. That's benefitted us and as a result of that, we've stumbled on to a lot of different thing. At this time last year, I don't think we would have expected to be playing Williams at the five, and when we kind of stumbled on to that, all of a sudden a lot of our other players took these huge developmental jumps.

That doesn't mean that we are going to do that all the time but you also can't ignore the signal that's sending you when all the players are performing at such efficient levels at times when you're playing with small lineups and you're putting these multiple players on the floor at the same time.

As I said earlier, we still have a lot more to do with the team over time. But we feel like these two guys will be additive but we are not putting the final touches on anything.

**Q. Sam mentioned Wallace's defensive metrics. In your observation of him, what were things that were really jumping out about the way he approaches his job on the defensive end of the floor?**

ACIE LAW: The biggest thing is the maturity in his game. He's a highly intelligent player. He's an extremely tough player. He's competitive and those are the things that you look for in young players. As I mentioned before, we are just looking forward to getting him in, seeing his development, seeing him grow, and we think that like Sam said, he can be a big addition to our team.

SAM PRESTI: I want to add one thing to that. I think Acie and Vince did a good job really breaking down Cason's impact as an off-ball defender. People talk a lot about basketball intelligence on the offensive floor.

But what Acie and Vince did a great job of identifying is this



guy has a high level of basketball intelligence defensively off the ball. His ability to read situations, rotate, anticipate things, break plays up.

You know, just to me, the one thing about him that I really respect and I appreciate is all the hard things about playing basketball, the things that a lot of people don't want to do or push themselves to do, he does naturally. And I'm not sure where that comes from, but he's got a lot of just natural instinct that really just kind of serve the values of the game.

**Q. You used the word in your end of season press conference, nasty and I know a lot of that is going to come with the physical maturation of the team but do you feel like tonight you're getting a little bit of that as well potentially?**

SAM PRESTI: I think it's pretty hard. When I say that, I'm thinking of more of a collective mindset more than an individual thing. I think what we're trying to add with these guys are more like-minded guys. I think it's hard to put that type of monicker on first-year players.

But I do think both of them have really strong competitive dispositions, and I think that's always something that we're looking for, and I think they will do a good job blending in with the group.

But overall when I'm saying that, that's a team mindset that we have to continue to adopt. As I said many times before, with the younger group, you know, we have to overcome the things that we may lack in experience, and a lot of that is just prioritizing things, and making decisions about the things that are going to be most important to us, and sometimes we are going to have to amp it up and be able to hold our ground in situations, and I think that will happen through more experience in situations.

**Q. Sam mentioned Wallace's off-ball and IQ on defense, how about on offense in terms of his ability to play off the catch, straight-line drives, all those kind of things that fit into the Thunder system?**

ACIE LAW: Again, you talk about his maturity. Like one of the things that we were intrigued with was his ability to play on the ball and off the ball. He's an unselfish player. He plays to win. He doesn't play for himself and those are things that we value, and I don't want to sound like a tape recorder, but we are looking forward to getting him in because he does a lot of things that we like.

**Q. Will in Washington now, what was it like not having him around tonight, first time in about a decade and a half?**

SAM PRESTI: Been with him for a really long time, so I'm super proud and excited for him and he's going to do -- he's already off to a great start obviously. To be with Michael and just to have those two guys working together, it's surreal.

I'm super grateful because I know myself personally, like I've been so blessed over the time I've been here to work with people like that, to have had Will for that long, I was the beneficiary of that just like with Mike or any of the other guys. Now Acie has stepped right in and has done an incredible job this year.

So we are a collection of individual people that are all kind of working towards a common goal and I want to believe that when people leave here and they go into bigger and better things that they feel like they did, you know, some of their best work of their lives. I just couldn't be more excited for him. I think it's great and I think he's going to do great.

**Q. What's it feel like, you've got quite a few disciples, I guess, around the league that worked here.**

SAM PRESTI: Yeah, again, we've been so lucky. We have been very fortunate in a lot of ways. We've been very fortunate with players. We have gotten very lucky in a lot of ways with our players and the things that they have contributed to the organization, and the way that they have represented the organization.

You know, I just think people in general. We've been super blessed. We've had some people with us for 16 years, and other people that were with us for a few years and were able to move on to other opportunities.

But it's something that we all contribute to. I don't think it's like a one-person thing. I don't think we are all serving the organization. It's no one's personal job. We are like serving the position. I just feel very grateful to have worked with these people over the course of time.

**Q. In your role, how much is beyond just observing and evaluating the basketball talent? How much is personal interaction, chatting with these guys and getting to know them?**

ACIE LAW: The draft prospects that's a part of the process. My responsibility is it lead our scouting group. We run an expansive and extensive process to get to this point. Part of that process is spending time with the players. But primarily my role is to lead our scouting department.

**Q. Do you take personal pride, the first pick tonight is**



**a Dallas guy?**

ACIE LAW: That didn't go into it. I'm here to --

SAM PRESTI: That's not what you said back there (laughter).

ACIE LAW: I'm excited for Cason, but more importantly, I'm excited to be a part of this great organization. Going through this, I'm learning a lot. This guy here is amazing, and I'm just looking forward to contributing and helping this community be proud of this team.

**Q. Is there anything, a lot of guards from Kentucky, the coaching style they get from Cal?**

ACIE LAW: As I mentioned before, we are going through this process with an open mind and the guys that are best fit for the organization and that was no different tonight.

Cason we felt like is a wonderful individual. Felt like he's tough as I mentioned before. Feel like he's a great player and feel like he has a bright future ahead of him and we look forward to getting him in house and working with him and seeing where he goes.

SAM PRESTI: And a combination of things that my Ron had mentioned is having someone like Acie working with us who has played in the league, been drafted, has all this basketball experience.

Again, I'm sitting in a room with Nick, Nazy, people that have done this for -- you know, have been part of the 450 people that play in the NBA, and their insights into these things, especially spending time with the guys I think is a huge advantage because they have been in that position.

And now they are in obviously a different side of it but it's a huge help to have somebody that's played at the highest level and can give you a better insight into maybe what I might be missing or what someone else might be missing, so it's been hugely valuable to have those guys.

T.J. White -- you can't underestimate what the guys have done.

**Q. A lot of guys talk about wanting this, but -- (inaudible) -- gave up \$5 million for a chance to play basketball, what does that store mean to you?**

ACIE LAW: Means that he loves to play and what better person to add to your organization than somebody who is really passionate about this game, takes it seriously, professional and wants to be the best version of themselves and for us, we look forward to getting them

minutes so we can hopefully contribute to them doing that.

SAM PRESTI: The thing about him that sticks out is he's all business. It's been fun to follow the journey back to this point, and -- what he's feeling, I'm sure excited to meet him and his folks and as I said before, just, you know, it's a serious -- both of these guys are pretty serious guys. So I think they will be -- we'll really enjoy getting to know them, and I think you guys will, too.

**Q. You talked about late in the draft process -- beating down the door for you guys and at the same time on the other end of the equation -- a known commodity and on your radar for a while. Where does Cason fall in that?**

SAM PRESTI: That's a great question. I don't know, the longer I've done this now, I was saying this to the staff this morning a little bit. It's why I'm always using observation, you hear me say that a lot. I think one of the things about the draft is you sometimes have to let it kind of come to you. I believe you just have to be very patient with it. Saw him play many, many times. I don't want to tell you that we're sitting there in December saying, this is the person we're going to draft. You don't know. You have to stay so open and I think stop yourself from making big judgments early.

I can say we went to see him play early in the season. I saw him in McDonald's and I liked him at McDonald's because he was a serious dude and there to get better. The first time I saw him live in Indianapolis, he was doing these small things that, like, just I'll call it no agenda basketball. Like kick-ahead the, every block out, two-hand contests, things that are really hard to do and for a player of that calibre or talent to do that naturally, that really caught my attention.

And as we were going through the process, as I said before, it's not just -- as much as people want to believe it's like ranking the most talented players, it's not really like that. It's also huh can we help them be successful here, and what are the headwinds that they can run into. How do they help amplify the other players that we might have because if you are so focused on selecting who is going to go down on the list as the most talented in some type of free draft on the Internet, I think you run a huge risk of putting yourself in a position to select somebody that doesn't really have a chance in your particular organization for one reason or another.

So you have to, I think, for me, try to handicap the obstacles each player might face and also the effect that those obstacles or that player might have on other players that are existing on the team. So it's not as easy as take

the best player. The other aspect -- him, athletically, competitive. I think he's had a great approach to the whole thing. I think he left a positive impression on us. But he's not far. He wasn't playing far from here, so we had a pretty good handle on him. We feel pretty fortunate that he was there.

As I said before, this is the starting point of his development track. It's the end of his amateur career and really just the beginning of his professional career, so we have to see where that heads, but I think he feels comfortable here. I think Cason felt the same thing, and I do think that matters. I do think that matters to us.

**Q. Some of the things you've said about Wallace tonight, I remember what you said a year ago, but it struck me that some of the things that I saw and you probably saw in Santa Clara throughout his rookie year, in terms of not necessarily one thing he does great, but just does everything right and a lot of things well. Are there similarity between the two?**

SAM PRESTI: I wouldn't compare the two players in terms of their games so to speak. I do think that they both play both ends, and they both do things that drive winning but maybe aren't like smashing you in the face like highlight reel type stuff.

Yeah, there's some -- there are some similarities, but thinking about Cason here, like he was a photocopy when he was younger, and I think you see some of these like secondary-type instincts in him defensively and the more we watched him, he just has really good anticipation.

I think, again, with a lot of the guys that we have currently, their ability to think the game and make quick decisions but that doesn't always mean with the ball, you know what I mean. And so that's one of the things that I think both those guys have but I think a lot of our guys kind of possess some of that. But yeah, they are well rounded players that do small things that I think drive winning, and fit the play style we're striving for. You know, I'm excited to see how he blends in with everybody.

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