

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Coach Mark Daigneault

Press Conference



Q. You got Micic sort of just came out of the blue. We thought he might come, didn't know when. He's here. How do you expect to use him and how does he fit in?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: We'll see about that. We've got a long three-week training camp here. We'll have a lot more information not only on him but on the team at the end of that, and then we've got 82 to play after that.

There's one thing about him, I have a lot of respect for, number one, what he's accomplished overseas. He's an incredible, incredible player over there that has an illustrious career and really is a legend over there at this point.

But I also have a lot of respect and administration for the fact that he's kind of thrusting himself into this position because he's really got nothing to prove as a player, and yet he's putting himself kind of at square one in the NBA, and he's doing so with great vulnerability, which I have respect for the courage that that takes.

Excited to get him out with the rest of the guys, and excited to see what he can bring to the team.

Q. Shai and Josh, real strong performances at the World Cup. Just your thoughts on what they were able to do and how they might be able to translate that to what they do here?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, it's unique, the game pressure of those games is incredible. I mean, the pride that those teams take in representing their countries and how competitive FIBA and the Olympics are is great development for our players' growth. For our players obviously they get the opportunity to showcase what they can do, but also I think everybody, not only those guys but Lu and Bertans, Jack White, I think everybody had a participated has something to gain from that. Hopefully their blade is a little sharper coming into camp because of it. I think a positive step forward for all those guys.

Q. On paper, people look at Chad and say he fits into a

lot of things that you didn't do, the rim protection, some of the lob threat stuff. You're adding a unique player to your system. How do you see that fit from what you know of him?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Hard to know right now. It's day zero for us as a team and for him. What I've found with rookie players is there's always going to be things that they're behind on, there's going to be things they're ahead on. You don't really know until you get going.

I do know that we want every player to have a style of play individually that's efficient and that's impactful to the game and to the team. That's what we strive for with every player. That's what every player should strive for.

That's the bigger focus for him and for everybody, more so than how we use them or what the role is. That stuff just kind of emerges naturally as we evaluate the team and as we evaluate each individual in the context of the team, and he'll be no different.

Q. Young centers especially kind of while I centers struggle to set screens early in their career. How do you coach Chet in year one?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Again, we're not going to make any assumptions that he is or isn't. I think we use everybody as a screener. We've shown that in the past, so that won't be an isolated skill to him. Everybody on the team screens. Shai was our most efficient screener for most of the year last year, and he's obviously a ball dominant player, but we move everybody around in those ways, and those fundamentals kind of transcend the individual players, so he'll learn it like the rest of the team.

Q. Looking back at the season Shai is coming off of, it would be easy to look at that as his peak, not only what he did offensively but on the defensive end, as well. I know he's going to take about things he can improve on, but what do you see in his game that he could take an even further step?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, it's all he's ever done is improve, so it wouldn't be a surprise if he's better.

The defensive thing was huge for us last year, not only for him individually but what it did for our team. The lineups



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we were able to put on the court were in large part due to the way that he defended. We were able to put him out there with all shooting, we were able to put a lot of small lineups out there, and his defense and the defense of the other guys had a lot to do with it. You've got to still move the scoreboard in a positive direction with any lineup you put out there. He had a lot to do with it.

In terms of improvement, I think as guys get to kind of the prime of their career, which is about where he is, it's more nuances, it's more touching up the edges. The large jumps usually happen before that. He's obviously had large jumps, but he's a guy that he's got great focus as a professional and great commitment to that focus, great work behind that focus, and that's why he always improves, and he'll continue to do that. He had another great summer.

Q. With Chet, there's a lot of talk, is he a 4, is he a 5. I know that's going to change depending on what lineup he's in. We saw him play with J-Will a little bit in Summer League. I assume there's going to be times where he's the lone big out there. How do you see his role kind of changing as you find out more about his game?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, as I mentioned earlier, the individual styles of play are really where it's at. It's about finding a way of playing for every player, not just for him, that's efficient and that's impactful. Then your role changes based on the team.

But what role you occupy, what position, numbered position you are on the court, how many minutes you play shouldn't alter the way you play. It's really about finding an efficient, impactful way of playing for Chet and for every other player on the team, and who he's out there with won't change how he plays. He's going to play how he plays.

Q. Coach, back to Chet a little bit, early on in the summer, played really well with the Summer League, but since then what are some of the things that you've seen as you prepares to head into training camp and into the season for his first year? What are some things you've seen or heard about him this summer that have gotten him ready for the season?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Dating back to last year, I have great respect for his willingness and ability to follow process. It was pretty mundane, the recovery from that injury, and he did a great job with that.

He's a great worker.

But I think there's a lot of -- every question seems to be

about him. There's a lot of excitement about him. But what I'll say is, number one, the number one thing he has to have right now is gratitude. He hasn't been able to play in a year, and he needs to go out there and enjoy the opportunity to be back on the court.

Then we all need to take it a day at a time with him and with our team. It's day zero. He hasn't been under game pressure since a year and a half really, since the NCAA Tournament.

So the road is long for our team, the road is long for him. But I think if he's grateful, comes in, earns the respect and trust of his teammates, then it'll set us on a developmental track with him, and that's the same as everybody on the team.

Q. What is the magic formula for maximizing talent because you've got a good roster here now, but the last couple of years it hasn't been what you want. You're adding pieces, yet you still continue to overachieve might be the word.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, the last couple years has been exactly what we want. Had high belief in the young core of our team from day one, and the maximization of talent, there's nothing magical. It's no secret. It's professionalism. It's commitment to a program. Guys competing together, learning how to be efficient players, growing through all their experiences. It's simple stuff to understand, hard stuff to do consistently.

Then it's a willingness of the guys to do it together, and I think that's been the mark of this group of guys, not only last season but in prior seasons. This group has been willing to walk that path together, which I think is pretty unique, and that's what it's got to continue to be.

But it's something that doesn't carry over. We can't take that for granted. The team has to reinvest in that this year.

Q. Over the last several years there's been a lot of talk about rebuilding and the process and things like that. But you started to have some success as a team certainly towards the end of last year. Are you at the point now where you can start adding tangible goals to that process, and if so, what might those goals be?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: We're still building. I mean, let me be very clear on that. We're still building. This is a young team, and the building process transcends any individual season. We're always trying to evolve and become better, and this is no different.

The goals -- I'd call them really standards. I think the



outcome goals can be noisy, but we have really high standards inside our walls of professionalism, like I've mentioned, commitment, competing together, players learning to be efficient, learning how the team can be efficient, and growing together through rich experiences of an NBA season. Those are our standards, and then whatever the outcomes are as a result of those things, we can lay our head on the pillow at night knowing that we've maximized ourselves and maximized the team, and that's what we'll continue to do.

Whatever boxes we check along the way is where we're supposed to be in that process.

Q. Coming off that year that he had, what are maybe the logical next steps for J-Dub in his maturity?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: We'll see. I think it's a different feeling when you're going into your second year. I think when guys are rookies, you look at Cason, Keyontae, those guys, they're just trying to figure out what the NBA is about. Everything is a first experience.

Once you've got a year under your belt, it feels different, and it'll feel different for Jalen. You also get played differently. You're on people's radars more, and there's challenges that come with that that force you to evolve. That's how you get better.

He's going to have to evolve to continue on the track that he's on, but we have no doubt he'll do that. He had a great summer. He's a hard worker. He's got a great maturity about how he approaches things, and I'd say that's pretty much true for all of our guys.

Q. The other day Sam said that Josh has to get to the free-throw line more often so that you guys have paid your dues on that and at times guys are teeing off on him. How much of that is just due to his size where like smaller guards might get more calls because there appears to be more contact, and how much of it is him learning the game a little bit more and how to draw fouls when he's driving?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, we've got to look in the mirror first, and he's done a great job with that. I thought he played with great physicality in FIBA. His free throw rate in FIBA dwarfed what it is in the NBA.

I thought he did a great job in that stretch of time of really putting the referees in a position where they had to call something. I have no doubt he'll continue to do that.

Then to what Sam said, we drive the ball at epic proportions every season. Referees call fouls on drives

more than any other situation in the NBA. So two plus two should equal four there, not only for Josh but for the whole team.

Q. You used a lot of different players last year, a lot of different lineups, a lot of different players in the game, which means you've got a lot of decisions to make in terms of rotations and things. When do you do that? Do you do that the morning of a game, before the game, during the game, just it comes to you? Or is it a more involved process where you're always thinking about long-range sort of game plans?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Good question. Definitely not now. I think a three-week training camp we're going to know a lot more about the team by our first game than we will today for sure. To your question, a little bit of everything. A lot of prep. We try to really understand our lineup data, but not necessarily in terms of what's good or bad but in terms of the trade-offs, and then as situations come up in the season or in the game, we try to deploy lineups that we think can be advantageous for the team.

Then philosophically, it keeps everybody engaged, knowing that at any moment you could go in the game. It also keeps everybody on edge. They know that minutes aren't guaranteed. We're going to do what's best for the team. It keeps our opponents on their toes.

So we think there's a lot of advantages to be gained by keeping things open and fluid, and I'll continue to do that.

But going back to training camp, the integrity of the camp is that you go out there and you compete, and our guys are going to have to do that, and we'll start to make those decisions when we have to, certainly not today.

Q. Does this year feel any different? I know first year you've been in charge where maybe the public or fan expectation is to make the Playoffs this year.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Doesn't feel any different. The outside atmosphere respectfully is fleeting, so that's not a reliable source of motivation because it comes and goes based on outcomes. We have, like I mentioned, high standards inside of our walls that when performed to our capability raise the bar higher than anything externally can, and so that's our challenge as we start off here, and this group has a history of doing that well, but we've got to go earn it again, and that starts tomorrow.

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