

# Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

## Mike Muscala

### Press Conference



**Q. What was it like to go through the playoffs with these guys?**

MIKE MUSCALA: It was awesome. I feel so grateful for the opportunity to come back. Obviously a lot of memories here and years spent here. To see the success that the team had throughout the year, I was watching games all the time. Is just to be able to come back and be a part of the team meant a lot to me.

**Q. Mark was telling us about how in his first year as a coach, you guys had one of those arena walk-throughs, and he was kind of looking up in the stands and saying, the things that we're working on now are going to put T-shirts in this arena someday. Do you remember maybe that specific conversation or something like it in those early years and kind of what that means today?**

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, I don't remember that specifically, but I do remember those notions. Mark and I were talking, Game 1 of the first round at home, just the energy in the arena and to experience that after some of the recent years was just amazing. Yeah, it's been quite the journey. I'm so proud of him. He's done such a great job, Sam, all the young players that contributed to it.

**Q. As a veteran, what stands out the most to you about what Chet Holmgren was able to do this season?**

MIKE MUSCALA: Honestly to me the biggest thing -- some of the biggest things with Chet are obviously his competitiveness and just he never -- he's always fighting hard every play. He'll run back hard in transition. He'll make the right rotation defensively. It's a lot of little things. Obviously he's got great skill for his size. I think he's the most underrated shot blocker in the NBA.

His presence at the rim and his tenacity in terms of continuing to go for blocks and not just giving up easy dunks because he's afraid to get dunked on, that goes a long way. I was really impressed with what I saw. He's got

a very bright future.

**Q. You were here for Shai's early years. You look at it then until now, I wouldn't say it's a surprise, but what is it to see in him from where he was to now, one of the top players of the league, in just a short time?**

MIKE MUSCALA: I was very impressed, blown away early on from playing with him. He's such a very gifted and calm and cool player that even in the game last night, in a high-pressure game, he was so composed. To have that mixture of composure, his athleticism, and his balance, his finishing, his shooting. He had obviously a great year. It's been awesome to see.

**Q. After a couple different runs here and being in Oklahoma City, what does this organization mean to you personally?**

MIKE MUSCALA: It means a lot. I went through a lot in my life when I was here, just the city, the fans, the way that they support the team, what the team means to the community, those are things that I feel like I can relate to.

I'll always be a Thunder fan no matter what happens in my life.

**Q. As the teams inch closer and closer towards the big goal, (inaudible) I just wondered what you saw here, how is that in comparison to the operation here now that they're inching forward?**

MIKE MUSCALA: That's a good question. Mark alluded to how many years those guys have been in the playoffs on the Celtics compared to the guys here. There's been several years -- the thing about Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown, great young players who have fought hard in those playoff series. So I think there are similarities.

Boston is a special place too. It will be fun to watch them going forward.

**Q. What was your process like when you decided to come back?**

MIKE MUSCALA: I was meditating in the park, and I seen a missed call from my agent. It was after All-Star break. I was in Detroit. I really liked Detroit, liked the city, Monty

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Williams.

It felt like I was just going on my own journey that I thank Mark a lot for helping me with the general mindset. Yeah, just kind of came about after All-Star break. It seemed surreal at the point, and still does. I've been all over the place in the past 14 months. I lived like six places. It's been a journey I wouldn't trade for anything at the same time.

**Q. You were presented with the opportunity, but it was something that you felt like (inaudible).**

MIKE MUSCALA: It was not easy for me, but I'm very grateful I did it, yes.

**Q. (Inaudible).**

MIKE MUSCALA: I've heard Derrick Favors quote him on this, but just being where your feet are is a big saying he has. Just with the different places I've lived and the amount of them especially, in the last year especially, just being able to embrace that journey and not fight it, and just be grateful for every breath every day because you never know what can happen in life.

**Q. Mark was saying how enjoyable it was for him to come in every day and coach this group and be in the mix with you guys. How much did you feel that?**

MIKE MUSCALA: I felt that. He's a great teacher. He's a great speaker and ties the game into so much of life. I definitely felt that, and I could sense the players being eager and intent on learning too.

**Q. How rare is it for this young group to have this mixture of joy and levity but also professionalism in this environment?**

MIKE MUSCALA: That's a good point. It's rare. That's something Sam alluded to in the meeting we had, not to take -- just stay humble about that because it is rare. It just goes to show the qualities of the young guys on the team. It's really cool.

**Q. Your decision, you consider it wasn't easy for you. Where did the difficulty lie in your decision to come back?**

MIKE MUSCALA: I've been moving all other, Brother, moving all over. That's really what it comes down to.

**Q. What do you hope is next for you?**

MIKE MUSCALA: I'm going to go back home. I'm going to

finish packing, get my dog, get my dad's F-150. Drive up to Kansas City, spend the night, finish the drive tomorrow.

**Q. Do you hope to be back here next year, if it's an option?**

MIKE MUSCALA: I haven't thought about that.

**Q. You mentioned playing for a few teams over the years, but you're one of the few guys on this roster that's also a member of that bubble team. Can you put it in perspective the growth of Shai and particularly with Lu being a two-way guy now and shooting at like 40 percent from the three.**

MIKE MUSCALA: Sometimes I think about that, especially when I see who's out there playing. The bubble -- I mean, what was that, four years ago, man, it's long, but it's also not at the same time. So I don't know.

Yeah, I can't even put it into words, to be honest. It's just something that I feel so grateful to have experienced and to have been back with the guys. There's just a presence about them that -- you know, Lu and Shai, but just embracing the moment. I think the bubble, to answer your question, is an example of -- I remember Danilo Gallinari, who I got really close because we got traded together a couple of times to D.C. and Detroit. He was saying at the time how excited he was for the bubble, and I think that mindset that he had was really helpful for me and the rest of the guys, where he just embraced it and felt so grateful to be able to play basketball during a time when obviously COVID was wreaking havoc. It was a really tough thing for a lot of people.

So I think that a lot of us just felt immense gratitude to be able to play a game that means a lot to us in an environment that the NBA was able to procure for us.

**Q. Did you have an extra bond with those guys in the bubble compared to teammates you've had in the past?**

MIKE MUSCALA: Probably, yeah. We were eating meals together after games. We were playing poker in the room, for sure, yeah.

**Q. Watching from a distance, were you surprised that they made those jumps they did from the bubble to the 23, 24 wins, to where they are now? Just the development of the team, I guess.**

MIKE MUSCALA: Yes and no. I think obviously Chet is a huge part in the team's success and J Dub played great this year. So I would say yes.



**Q. What are the biggest games you saw from J Dub particularly? You saw his rookie season up close, but then you got to jump back in and see him in practice. Were there any things that surprised you about the way he was playing and came back?**

MIKE MUSCALA: Yeah, his confidence was very high because obviously he's worked for that, and he's continued to just be that creator, that aggressor out there. He had a great year.

His competitiveness, his tenacity, and just being out there, like I said, truly being that like creative ball handler that can score, that can guard defensively. He really impressed me with what he did. He had a great year.

**Q. Mike, I've seen some of the young guys grapple with the playoffs, the level of detail that wasn't there in the regular season?**

MIKE MUSCALA: Sorry, what was the question?

**Q. How did you see the guys deal with, some of the young guys of being under the microscope in the playoffs with the level of detail that's required?**

MIKE MUSCALA: They did great with it. I think they just remained present and asked good questions, and the coaching staff did a great job watching film with us and giving us good game plans. But I thought that they did a great job.

They also didn't overthink things too in the playoffs. They had a level of just going out there and playing too. So it was good.

**Q. Mike, you went to playoffs in the bubble, no fans, and this is the first time you have an ecosystem of fans. What did you think of the fans during playoff time and also the airport welcome?**

MIKE MUSCALA: I remember talking one of our strength coaches, and I said I've been playing 11 years, and I've never experienced anything like this in a playoff game. It might've been the first round. It was insane in there. It was amazing. Just the togetherness of the crowd, the rhythm that they had.

There was just a rhythm to it with wearing all the same color shirt and the loudness. Shout out to the fans. They were amazing. Even getting off the plane last night, I know they had been at that gate a couple other times during these playoffs, but even last night just getting off the plane and seeing that, that's something I'll never forget.

**Q. Can you describe the difficulties of like being traded multiple times over the last like 14 months or so? Like what that is maybe tangibly like or maybe emotionally like?**

MIKE MUSCALA: I don't view them as difficulties truthfully. I just view it as a journey that -- in years past, when it's kind of first happening, getting traded, I was a bit naive to it, and I think I probably fought it in a way of a new situation and whatnot.

I think now I just view it as a blessing, but to be able to play in the NBA and to have those kinds of things happen, to go from OKC to Boston to D.C. and to Detroit and now back here, it's like what other job could I have experienced something like that in such a short window? To see some really cool places, to meet some really cool people, and to get to know different cities, like to get to know their history more. It's place I wouldn't live if it wasn't for playing in the NBA.

I guess I just try to stay as grounded as possible with it, but also acknowledging it is a high-energy kind of thing, it is NBA basketball. So I am looking forward to just decompressing a bit this summer.

**Q. If you go from Detroit, a losing situation, to Oklahoma City but your minutes will be less, how do you look at that, as a playoff potential situation but maybe losing minutes? How do you look at that whole situation?**

MIKE MUSCALA: I would have come back to Oklahoma City regardless of whatever the record was or anything. It wasn't about that for me.

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