

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Shai Gilgeous-Alexander Press Conference



Q. Obviously not the way that you guys wanted to end it, but Mark talked about the year over year growth, even the grit in the playoffs that you guys showed. How proud are you of this group, yourself, all of you for navigating what you did and managing to get better throughout it all?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I think above all it was just very fun. I think that's where it all starts. Like every day you come to work where it doesn't feel like work. You come to work, and you try to excel individually and as a group. When you have so much fun, it makes everything else easier. It kind of clouds all the bad stuff because you're having so much fun.

So that's what I'm like most proud about and most grateful for, how fun this group has been and how much this group has like taken the ease off of all the pressure and stuff that gets heavy.

Q. What's made this group so fun? We know all you guys love to compete. You're having fun out there just hooping. We see the joy you guys have on the sidelines or just around each other. But what makes this group so unique?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: It's a unique blend of characters. Ultimately, we all have the same goal, and all of us are selfless and want to accomplish that goal. I guess we just have a group of guys who are funny and good to get along with.

Yeah, it's super unique. It's something I've never felt before from a basketball team, and it's hard to find, especially at this stage in your career. It's something I'll never take for granted.

Q. Referring to the balance for you guys, obviously the joy, the fun, the levity, but also when you guys were on the court, there was a real focus and real sense of professionalism. What went into that balance of your group?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: We're all super competitive at the end of the day, like we get into it at practice, go back and forth, talk smack. Like on the court it's super competitive, but off the court we are so close and so connected, and we genuinely care about each other that we know it's coming from the right place and we know that we have each other's back.

When you have that kind of feeling, you feel a little bit invincible, even indestructible because your teammates, like your brothers, are all behind you.

Q. Shai, you talk about guys as individual contractors, and you guys don't necessarily need to have that bond that you guys have, but you do. Where does that come from? How does that start organically?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I don't really know. This group, ever since I've been in Oklahoma, has been really tight. It feels like the younger we get, the closer we get. I don't know if it's just because we're all around the same age. But it's definitely made like a difference in our performance, in our like togetherness on the court, our resilience.

Like we can all feel it. Myself, guys who were here early like Lu, Muscy, K-Rich, you can feel the togetherness of the group and how it's affected the group. It's a really good feeling.

Q. Is that unusual around the league? You've been here most of your career, one year in L.A., but is it unusual that you guys are that way?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Absolutely. Honestly, it feels like it's an unusual, period. Like I've never been this close to a basketball team in my life. Maybe my AAU team. I love them. Like those guys I went to high school with, and then we left high school and went to AAU practice, and we left there and they came to my house and I went over to their house.

But since then, I haven't felt this connected. Naturally, you grow up, you have your own lives. You have families, and you go your own separate ways. But this group's togetherness has been special for sure.

Q. With that in mind, you've become a father during

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this playoff run. Having such a close group and being able to go through all those experiences, how has that been for you as well?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: It's been amazing. A lot of learning, a lot of joy, a lot of love. Super humbling, puts a lot of things into perspective, shows you like what really matters in life.

Kind of like takes your mind off that don't really matter.

Q. Last season you mentioned this team is like a bunch of high school kids. How do you describe them now? Still high school kids?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Absolutely. Might have gotten younger, like elementary school kids.

(Laughter).

Yeah, we have so much -- like we have so much fun together, crack jokes, before the game, after the game, wins, losses. We have so much fun that it just makes everything easier. Even a night like last night, like there was no group I'd rather lose like that with than this group. That's a good feeling.

Q. Shai, just Mark was talking last night saying he wants you guys to view the loss as an investment. Do you agree with that? Are you trying to weaponize this feeling?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Absolutely. I would agree 100 percent. Like the moment I stepped off the court, it felt like, well, we're here. We lost. We lost for a reason, and all you can do is learn and get better from that.

That's how you ultimately get to where you want to go and where we want to go. It would be great to win a championship this year. It would be great to achieve all of our goals, but more often than not, you don't get them when you want them, you get them when you deserve them.

I think this is a bump in the road. We learn from it. We get better. And hopefully get to our goal in the end.

Q. A lot of what people see from the outside comes from you guys are young and you believe there is this long window you guys have. How do you feel how long of a window it is in the NBA to win a championship?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I don't -- like I don't really -- I don't know if I don't believe in a window or I don't focus

on it, but I just feel like a window is like looking into the future and looking into like something you can't control. So all you can do is try to make the best of what you have in that moment and try to maximize what you have. Then from there, you get what you get.

But back then we knew it could be whatever someone said it would be, but I don't really focus on it.

Q. Mark was sharing a story from his first season as coach. You guys were going through a pregame walk-through at the arena. That was the year there was no fans. But basically saying like picturing T-shirts in the seats and the fan atmosphere. Being at this point, what do you think when you look back to the beginning of this journey?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, it's amazing. Like you put in the work, you do all the right things, and you hope to achieve your goals. Like so many people in whatever they try to do in life, do the right things, and work super hard and just never get there. To achieve your goals, you can't take it for granted. That's what I try not to do.

It's a super blessing. It's an amazing feeling. It's also motivational. Getting there, knowing what it feels like, knowing how it feels to lose in those situations, it's kind of a feeling you want to stay away from. You only stay away from it by getting better and overcoming it. That's something that's a goal of mine.

Q. All-time greats get to the level you're at right now. Even though their numbers slightly dip or stay the same, they act on small things to become a better player. What are some of those things you need to become a better player?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Good question. I don't -- it's a little bit too soon for me to pinpoint and 100 percent know. But just off the top of my head, you can always be more efficient, always. So I work on efficiency in every area. You can always be better defensively on and off the ball. And then just continuing to make sure my game doesn't hinder the development of the people around me, the development of my teammates, which is just as important as my development.

Q. Talk about hindering the development of your teammates, in late-game situations, a lot of players are different. LeBron takes the best player. Kobe takes a lot of shots. How did you come to the decision to be the guy that you are? You've been pretty open about being a Kobe guy. It's kind of the opposite of how he plays. How did you make the decision to be

(inaudible)?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I guess it's just the way I was taught to play. You make the right play. You try to keep the defense on their toes. That's another battle that you all go through, as a great player and as a closer. He should have passed it. He should have shot it. If you pass it and it goes in, great pass. If you make it and you miss, terrible shot, and vice versa.

It's give or take. So at the end of the day, I think it comes down to just trusting your work and trusting your decision-making and living with the results. People are going to have their opinions on your decision but it shouldn't affect your decision. As long as you're confident in it and you ride with it, you'll be all right.

Q. You talked about the dreams and aspirations going into the playoffs. Every kid that picks up a basketball wants to be in your spot, All-NBA team, top five MVP. At what point did that feel tangible to you, not just being in the NBA, but being one of the best players in the entire world?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Sometimes I sit back, and it's surreal, just like where I was a decade ago, the fact that I'm here now is a crazy feeling. Like you're always taught to like dream big, believe in yourself, but like growing up I was very -- a little delusional, many would say. And like I guess I probably sounded crazy back then and sounded a little bit too confident.

But I always like -- I always had a feeling I would get here. I always knew I could control my destiny and where I ended up to a certain degree. I knew how hard I worked. I knew how bad I wanted it. I was willing to do whatever it took to get here.

I don't think it's like coincidence that I'm here. I think I earned it. And it's for a good reason.

Q. You have the Olympics coming up this summer. Can you just talk about that? And there's a whole new international pool of players coming in. Do you feel like you're part of it being Canadian or not separate enough from USA Basketball?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I'm super excited for team Canada, to play with a lot of guys I grew up with. Get to play real games in the summer. That's always fun. Play for my country. Try to do something that's never been done before. That will be super fun.

That's a good question. I don't know. I guess I'm international, but like down the street. So I don't really

know. I guess on paper I'm international, but it feels like the same.

Q. It's been a few years since you've been in the playoffs. You've improved a lot since the last time you were in the playoffs. What was it like in the waiting time, the preparation for it, and what did it feel like to actually be in the playoffs?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: The waiting was stressful. It sucked. But all I could do was make sure I was prepared once the moment came. That's what I tried to do and tried to focus on.

The moment being here felt really good. There's nothing like it. It's hard to emulate or replicate. It's what you -- everything goes into it -- your off-season, the whole 82-game season, you playing basketball as a kid when you're 8 years old, like everything goes into it and trying to win the championship. The feeling of just being in, just the opportunity to try to get that done was an honor and a really good feeling.

Q. Did you get the feeling that this group has the capacity to win a championship, like what you guys have now?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Like I feel like we -- I feel like we can do anything we want to do. But I feel like, like if I told you -- if you knew me 15 years ago and I told you I was going to be who I am today, you would laugh at me. If I told somebody this time last year that we'd be the No. 1 team in the West at the end of this season, they'd laugh.

So I think, like myself, I always think you can do whatever you want to do. You just have to put the work in. If you put the work in and deserve it, you'll get it. So if we put enough work in, do the right things, stay together on and off the court, play the right type of basketball, and do what it takes to win a championship, we'll earn it, and we'll get a championship. But if we don't do that, we won't get it. It's that simple.

Q. Shai, looking at where you were ten years ago, who were you then, and where were you then?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Back home in Hamilton, got cut from a couple teams, wasn't really that good. I barely played on my ninth grade AAU team, and I was telling guys I was going to the NBA. It doesn't really make sense. Yeah, I just always had that feeling.

Q. So you got cut?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah.



Q. Everybody talks highly about your leadership. What kind of leader do you think you are, and what kind of leader do you want to be?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I try to lead by example. I've always, like I just felt that's most natural for me. Like I can't ask my teammates to do something that I physically won't do myself. I can't ask them to sacrifice what I don't sacrifice myself. I feel like in order to get respect from people, you have to take action as opposed to words. I feel like that's a natural and effective way to lead.

Q. When you said you were going to be in the NBA, what did you know about yourself that they didn't?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: How bad I wanted it. Yeah, like how motivated I was. I kind of mentioned this yesterday, when I fail and lose is when I'm most motivated. I think getting cut kind of kickstarted that.

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