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Sam Presti

Press Conference



Q. Based on the release, it sounds like you and Josh had discussions and that those discussions may be turned toward a trade when he didn't want to -- when he didn't see himself in this kind of bench role. I guess what I'm wondering is did Josh specifically request a trade? If he did envision himself in that role, would this deal still have been on the table?

SAM PRESTI: First thing I'd want to say about that, I couldn't speak more highly of Josh. And the way that those conversations took place. I want to make sure that's established at the front end.

Primarily, when you draft somebody, you're bringing them into the NBA, and you're basically trying to figure out with them how you walk with them to find their ultimate potential. So it's a real -- I don't know, it's a process I really enjoy.

As a result of that, my hope is that I have the kind of relationship with all the guys that we can talk openly and honestly, and that's really what the result of that was.

So it wasn't -- I think you might have used a word like demand. It certainly wasn't anything like that. But as we're thinking about the best way to optimize the team -- and in that case, also him and his talent -- you're coming up with different ways because the team has changed quite a bit, and it will continue to change. I think I was pretty clear about that in my end of season press conference.

As that happens, you have to adjust and adapt and modify. I mean, the coaches have to figure those things out. It also makes my job easier, you know what I'm saying? So that timeline is, I think, hopefully seen as the reflection of the relationship that the team has with the player and then the steps that we were trying to take there.

And ultimately, once we kind of got to the point where we were talking about potential other opportunities, the opportunity to add Caruso is really unique. Fortunately, everything lined up. I wish everyone -- I wish all of these types of things could line up that way. If we couldn't get

the return that we wanted or the player that we wanted, then we'd be in a different situation, but it made sense for everybody. I thought it was a productive process.

Q. You mentioned that you talked to Josh about coming off the bench next year. How much does Cason Wallace's development have to do with that conversation, a second team All Rookie guy at his position, and what do you see as Wallace's role going forward?

SAM PRESTI: I don't want to sound like a broken record here, but like the team has really, really developed and evolved quite a bit. Every time that happens, it changes and creates different opportunities for new players.

In this particular instance, one of the things that we were also trying to account for with the decision to move ahead with the trade with Josh was we do want to try to continue to open up opportunities for Chet and continue to explore that potential with him with the ball.

The decision with Josh also pushes more ball handling responsibilities to Cason, who's a player that we think very highly of but is going to need room to grow and opportunity. Even if those immediate dividends may not be perfect because that's how people and players get better, but they need to be exposed to those opportunities.

So there's a lot of different, I would say, cascading effects of what ultimately the decision allows us to do with the team, and a lot of it's focused on continuing to try to develop the team, expand the boundaries of the team.

With Josh, I think it's clear that I think Josh is going to be an elite player. I have a lot of confidence in that. I think the Bulls got a great, like an absolutely great player, and I think he's going to be a great player for a long time. But I don't know that that was going to be possible within the construct of the team we have and where his ambitions were. I don't think there's anything wrong with that, and we talked about it quite openly, but this is more opportunity for other people. That opportunity that he was going to have will be distributed to other people.

Q. Hey, Sam, when you guys made the acquisition yesterday, I was reminded of Alex being in training camp with you guys. He didn't stick obviously, but I'm



curious if you could rewind on what it was about him coming out of A&M that you liked. Then just as you've tracked his career, what stands out about what he's bringing and what you're most excited about his game now to add?

SAM PRESTI: A couple things on that. First, one of the things about bringing someone into the organization that you're familiar with is it really allows you to be more aggressive. You know their habits. You know their preparation. You know the way they operate. You've seen them walk the halls, and I think that makes a big difference, because of the type of players and long-term people we want to try to put around the core of the team.

So a lot of the credit for this trade, in my opinion, goes to the scouts and all the people that did all that work with the Blue that year that got Alex into training camp that year. Brandon Barnett, Jesse Gould, and others were integral in working to get the training camp roster together that year, and that gave us an insight into him, which I think built some relationships and informed us further so that we could be as confident as we were as we pursued him.

The thing I remember about him in college is I watched a lot of his games but I was never there to watch him. However, he always ended up being one of the best players or the top players in the game. So consistently that it made you question whether or not we should be focused on him.

I remember writing a report on him that essentially was just like this guy could probably kick a 50-yard field goal, catch a deep fly ball on the warning track, throw a football 70 yards, and kick someone's ass in cards. I just think he's like a universal competitor.

Then we got him here, and he was an open mind also. He was a learner. Then you watch the career he's grinded out, it's all about the team. It's all about the technicalities and a curiosity about his own game and what it is he does well. I mean, he's a colossal competitor, and we want to have as many of those guys as we can in the building.

I think specifically, I think it helps elevate the whole group if you can have those types of brains, and we really wanted the heart and the head in the building. I think having had him here before made it that much more -- made it that much easier to make that decision.

So we couldn't be more thrilled to have him. He's the quintessential team, competitive, intelligent competitor.

Q. When you look at putting Alex Caruso into this rotation, what do you see this doing for the Thunder

defense? It's already got Lu and Chet. It's not like Williams and Shai are not any good either on defense. What does Caruso do for your defense?

SAM PRESTI: I think individually the data on him is extremely high class. His individual effect on defenses are well-known. I think the other thing about him is he can go -- he guards -- I know people oftentimes look at height, in when they talk about wing players or -- we look at effectiveness, and his effectiveness on bigger wings is extraordinary.

So it's just another versatile player. I think Lu does an incredible job on bigger wings too. So we'd rather have someone that's effective against those players than is ineffective but is tall.

To the heart of your question, it doesn't mean a lot if we don't get back to the fundamentals and the basics that got us to where we were at the end of the season. The team has to kind of wipe themselves clean of last year and come back with the same mentality, the same commitment to prioritize winning and doing all the little things and understand that we're not entitled to anything.

We'll have to earn the defensive recognition that people want to hang on us now, but that's going to be a challenge for us. It's something that we've got to earn every single day. We have to stack those days. We don't get to start where we finished. So I think there's a lot of potential there, but we all have to bring that to reality.

Q. Sam, I'm just curious how much the second round of the playoffs played into the wheels getting in motion for this particular trade, looking at the kind of player that Alex is versus just inability to put Giddey on the floor for big minutes?

SAM PRESTI: I don't understand the question.

Q. Just like watching the second round, did that have an effect on like this trade being put into action?

SAM PRESTI: Which part of the second round?

Q. Just Giddey playing lower minutes.

SAM PRESTI: Oh, Josh's role?

Q. Yes.

SAM PRESTI: No, not at all. When we ended the season and I addressed everybody, all the things that I said about Josh, I feel exactly the same way. I really believe in him. I think he's going to do great. I think he's a unique talent in

a lot of ways, and he's going to be good for a really long time.

I would have loved for that to take place here, and I think he would have thrived in the role, but I also am a realist and understand that at that age, having started his career the way he did, that could be a difficult transition.

My main focus is I care so much about our team and our players and our coaches that I do want to be sure that we have both feet in. I know for a fact that, if Alex wasn't available, Josh would have come back, and I think he would have done his best. I think he would have put -- Josh has been nothing but the consummate professional. He's been asked to make a lot of sacrifices. He has seen his role change. I think he's taken a fair amount of criticism, some of it undue, just because of the way the world works today, and he never flinched.

But in the off-season when you're getting things ready for the next year, after I spent a lot of time with the coaches and thought about things myself, we talked about those things, and I wanted him to be honest with me. I think that's really important. I know that, if I couldn't find something that I wanted to do, he would have come back, and I think he would have put his best foot forward.

Ultimately, I think his dream and vision was to lead a team, and I'm not going to -- I'm not questioning that at all. I actually think that is very realistic, but that probably wasn't going to happen here at this time. So we just prioritized what was best for us. Having the chance to get Alex Caruso was the best thing for us, and I'm glad that it happened to put Josh in a great situation.

I remember when we traded for Paul George. We sent Sabonis and Oladipo. At the time, I don't people understood how good those players were. Paul George is a more known player. But this is going to end up being a good trade for everybody, in my opinion.

We're getting a player that is the quintessential Thunder player. He's a technician, but he can communicate. I think he elevates, as I said before, the whole team with his approach, and I want that in the building. I want people like that in the building at all costs.

I think that Giddey is going to do great things in Chicago and be more of himself that we weren't able to capture here. I think that's a positive for everybody.

Q. Had Josh fully embraced whatever role you envisioned for him, was this a deal that still would have been made?

SAM PRESTI: I think that I don't really -- I don't think like that. I don't even understand the question, to be honest with you.

I think the thing that made us more open minded was the fact that the discussions with him took the turn that they did. But one thing has to happen for the other, so I don't see those as related. It happened as it did is what I'm saying.

What I can't do is I can't get into any specifics about my conversations with any other teams or what they think or anything like that. I wouldn't want them doing that myself. I feel comfortable telling you about my conversations with Josh because he and I talked about how we would handle that, but I don't feel comfortable talking about my conversations with the Bulls.

Q. That's fair. I was just asking because, based on kind of what you've been saying and what the release said, it seemed that Josh's feelings seemed to kind of spur this into action.

SAM PRESTI: Not necessarily. I think once -- we're looking for those opportunities at that point. We're going into social media world of hypotheticals and inferred things. I'm not going to go open that door.

Q. Sam, these are my words, not yours, but this seems to be a win now type of trade or at least how we would consider that. Is this kind of a sign of more things to come as far as continuing to be aggressive and where you guys are as a team right now?

SAM PRESTI: So would that be an indication that we were not trying to win previously?

Q. I think you know what I'm saying, but no, I'm not indicating you weren't trying to win before.

SAM PRESTI: We won 57 games, and we were the top seed in the West. I'm just going to leave that there.

Q. I mean trading a 21-year-old for a 30-year-old who's more -- you know, fits what you guys -- fits the way you guys want to play.

SAM PRESTI: That doesn't sound like it has anything to do with philosophy. That just has -- so if we traded Josh for a 22-year-old, would that be a win now move?

Q. I guess it would depend on the player but not as much -- I don't think it would be considered that.

SAM PRESTI: Like I said at the end of the season, we're

looking for the best ways to win. We're not married to one thing or the other, and we're certainly not trying to prove anybody wrong or anything like that. We're just looking for the best ways to elevate the team, continue to progress.

I will let people paint that or articulate or label that however they would like. We did not do anything different here in terms of how we approached it. Unless you want to just look at the ages of the players, but we wouldn't look at it quite like that, and I couldn't tell you what will happen.

In terms of the summertime, we've been -- apparently, we're going to sign every free agent that is on the market, and we haven't even had the draft yet. So like all of the speculation about our team and what we're going to do, I mean, unfortunately, it's just part of the business that we're in. We just kind of get dragged into all those, all the industry content.

But I couldn't tell you what's going to happen from here. We put everything through the same kind of filters. We try to decide if it's a positive value opportunity for the team, and then we take into account the dynamics that we're working with and try to make the best decisions we can. And we'll let other people label them however they would like.

Q. You mentioned Alex's familiarity with the organization. I just wanted to ask you about if there were any conversations with Mark since he had such an intimate relationship coaching him and the interest in this deal, and I guess what Mark's excitement is.

SAM PRESTI: Mark and I talk about everything. So I include him on just about everything that could actually be -- I don't like to bring things to him that I think are like potential options, but we're always talking. We talk all the time about the team, about things that we value, things that we feel like are on our plate and we have to consider and think about.

So with this particular case, yeah, of course. I mean, he coached him. I think it's a great thing that those guys have kind of like come full circle in their careers to get to this point, and I think it's a great thing.

I also think that he'll be excited about coaching Alex. They have a great relationship. But I think Alex has a lot of really close relationships with people here and that were here, that are no longer here, that are working with other teams.

So we're thrilled. He's the kind of player and person, the mentality that we want to stock as many of those guys together as we can, but they're hard to find. They're hard

to find.

Q. One last one for clarity. I just want to get this straight. Prior to your conversations with Josh taking the direction that they did, so you did view him as a long-term piece for this team? And that was the point that that vision maybe changed?

SAM PRESTI: I don't understand the question. You asked me a question like this about the Hayward trade. I explained it already, and they clipped the one part of it that wasn't accurate about what I said, where it said I missed on the trade or I missed on the player. That wasn't what I said. What I said was I missed how hard it would be for Gordon to make an adjustment midseason on our team and that I miscalculated the difficulty of that, and it wasn't reflective of how I felt about Gordon as a player.

So I don't want to do that again. I was actually, I think, protecting Gordon and helping people understand that his struggles were not a result of him as a player, but because I thought I may have miscalculated how difficult it was to add to our team midseason because of how we play and the fact that it was a different type of role than he's ever played in his career.

So I want to be careful about how I answer this because I don't want anything to be taken out of context. I've already said it. So can you ask it again?

Q. Sure, yeah. For what it's worth, I can't control other people clipping that stuff. I'm just asking you if, based on what was in the statement, kind of what you've said, if the point where things changed for your vision with Josh was that change of pace in your conversations with him and nothing prior to that. There was no indication prior to that that maybe --

SAM PRESTI: I answered that at the end of the season.

Q. Okay.

SAM PRESTI: Go back and look at what I said at the end of the season. I just don't want to get in a position where I'm re-explaining everything, and if I say it any differently, it seems inconsistent. I feel like I've already answered that.

Q. Sure. I was just asking for clarity.

SAM PRESTI: No, no, I understand. I think I was pretty clear about that.

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