

Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Isaiah Hartenstein

Press Conference



Q. What does this day feel like for you to walk into your new home?

ISIAAH HARTENSTEIN: Super exciting. Just being able to experience this with my family, too, has been great. They've been very open armed, even with my family, so it's been a great experience. We could kind of always tell from afar how the culture is is exactly how you expect it and even a little better, so it's been great.

Q. You can probably tell from afar just the camaraderie that the group has. It seems like you've been a guy that everywhere you've been, you've developed those types of relationships. What is it about you that you're able to do that and how excited are you to join this group?

ISIAAH HARTENSTEIN: I mean, to me, it's always just about doing whatever the team needs, so I feel like that also starts off the court, so just being a good teammate, being a good person. That's always important to me. It's being now in a culture where it means a lot to them is very exciting.

Q. How difficult was the decision to leave your situation in New York, and what was it about the Thunder organization that drew you in?

ISIAAH HARTENSTEIN: If I'm honest, it was hard. I was in a situation, I loved my teammates out in New York. I really appreciate what Tibs and Leon did for me, and the fans in New York showed a lot of love.

But going into this situation, this is very exciting. From afar, I always saw how the culture was, especially since they've been in OKC, how they established a culture. The style of play I think really fits me. I'm a high-IQ player. They have a lot of guys who cut, so I think to me I'm one of the best passers in the NBA.

Then just the culture, again. Very family based. There was just something that was really exciting to me. I felt like I could really expand my game here. Just especially

talking to Mark, how open-minded he is.

It's really exciting for me, and then just defensively, I think I can still bring a lot to the team. I feel like they were really good last year, but them bringing Caruso and myself in, I think we hopefully will take another step in that.

Q. You mentioned talking to Mark. What did those conversations sound like, and what will be your expectations in terms of role and minutes?

ISIAAH HARTENSTEIN: It was great. I think one of the questions which kind of really helped a lot, I asked him what do you think it takes to take the next step to win a championship. His biggest thing was the process, not skipping steps. So that's kind of how I approach every day of my life. So him having that same mindset with the team was very intriguing to me because a lot of people try to tell you a story or we do this to win a championship, but him coming in saying we have to take it step by step was great.

Role, I'm just here to do whatever the team needs to win. I've been in a lot of different situations. I know how to adapt. But again, the way they play here is really exciting for me, and I feel like I can expand my game a lot, especially offensively, here.

Q. How does your game complement Chet in your mind?

ISIAAH HARTENSTEIN: I think, high-IQ player. I think he's very skilled. I think we can play really good together. Defensively, having two of the top rim protectors on the court at the same time, it's not easy.

But I'm really excited. That's one thing, I'm really excited to see how that goes. He's very talented, and I think with my IQ, I'll have to do a little bit more of the dirty work so he can chill a little bit.

But it's really exciting. To me he's one of the most talented bigs in the NBA, so me and him on the court together I think is going to be very deadly, so I'm excited about that.

Q. Has anybody reached out to you so far on the team, and if so, what did they say?

ISIAAH HARTENSTEIN: Shai. I played with Shai at the

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Hoops Summit, so I kind of know him from before. I think people were talking about that I followed Shai, but I followed Shai in like 2016. But no, he just reached out to say he's really excited, really excited to have me, and he doesn't have to box me out anymore, so that's what he's excited about. So yeah.

Q. You talked about the culture here, but in the last couple years as an opponent watching the Thunder as a team, the way these guys went from nowhere to the play-in to the No. 1 seed in the west, what were your thoughts on the way the team was developing?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I think they were doing it the right way. I feel like they weren't trying to rush steps. I think every year you kind of saw them take the next step.

I think how professional they are. I think every time you see them go on the court, there's a certain competitiveness always to them. They're very excited for each other, and I think in the NBA you don't have that a lot where no matter who's doing good, the whole team is excited for each other.

I'm excited to come in, help them, just take another step. I think the way they play together is very exciting.

Q. You made 14 of 30 from deep a couple of years ago. You hadn't been shooting that much since. Is that something you want to expand on your game?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: Yeah, that's definitely something. I think you're an NBA player, you have to adapt to certain roles, and that's what I had to do in New York. I think my passing only came out probably last year, so my first year I had to adapt to a certain role. That was something that I felt like I can really bring, expand my game as I was talking about before, just getting back to the shooting aspect because before I was shooting it, so it's really just getting back to that and being more versatile because that's kind of what the team needs.

Q. Was there a point during the season or even the last couple years where you thought this could be a reality where you were going to be a sought-after free agent at the level you were?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: Yeah, I always had belief in myself, but I feel like especially after kind of Mitch went out, I had started most of the time. I think I showed I was a high-level center in the NBA.

Yeah, my biggest thing is really kind of approaching everything day by day. That was the biggest thing to me, so during the season I remember never really thinking much about free agency, it was more just trying to get

better each day.

Q. You're a really good rebounder, especially on the offensive end. Is that studying film? Is that instinct?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: It's mostly just going to go get it. But I study a lot of film. I kind of watch -- funniest thing, when I first came in the NBA it was kind of a weakness, so I think there was like a YouTube video of Taj Gibson showing how to box out or something like that, and so I watched that, and it helped a lot.

I mean, I think just throughout my career I always grew and stuff. What were my weaknesses when I first came in the NBA, it was more defense than rebounding were my weaknesses. I've tried to get better in that, and now it's my strength. Defense was more watching a lot of film of Draymond, Al Horford. I think film has probably been my best friend so far.

Q. You used the word "championship" a few times. Now that you're here, how close do you feel this team is to winning a championship?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: We're a great team, but I feel like, again, like Mark said before, it's a process. We're 0-0 now, so going in and saying, oh, we're going to win a championship right away, I feel like that's the wrong approach. I feel like when you get through that, you kind of let games slip.

So for us, I think the main thing is just going step by step, knowing we're a great team, having the confidence we can win every game, but you just can't skip steps, so that's the main thing.

Q. What did you learn from Tibs when you were in New York that helped you develop?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: A lot of defense, defensively. He was really smart defensively. Just little stuff, just kind of more like one-on-one defense, how to position yourself. Tibs was great. He always had us really prepared, so I'm always really grateful for that.

Q. What stood out to you about the trip Sam and some of the people from the organization took up to Eugene and that whole gesture?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I mean, Sam was the biggest thing. Just the culture, again. I feel like I've said it a lot of times, but to me it's really important having a culture where I feel like I can fit in. I feel like my family feels comfortable. Then just the belief he had in me, knowing I can help the team take another step.

Then with Mark, it was just, again, how process focused he was, how open-minded he was. I just really thought I could help the team a lot and expand my game. I feel like Mark gave me that kind of -- it was really comfortable. I knew I didn't really have to look over my shoulder a lot. It gives the guys a lot of confidence, so that was really intriguing to me.

Q. You're kind of seen as the biggest free agency signing in franchise history here. What does that mean to you?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I mean, it's an honor. But it's exciting. It's really exciting.

Just always looking from afar, OKC was always a team I was really excited about even watching when I was over in Germany when it was KD, Russ and James. Really exciting. Russ probably was one of the first guys who texted me, like if you ever need anything in -- I think he said the O or something, just let me know. It's really exciting.

Q. Sam reiterated how young you are. Do you feel like a younger player coming into this group or do you feel like a veteran?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: I mean, I'm young, but I think I'm mature. I think there's a difference. Also I think a lot of the guys aren't mentally young. I think that's what you kind of see from afar. It's not like a young group. If you kind of know what I mean, it's a very mature group. Age-wise they're young, but I feel like the approach they have to the game makes them very mature, and that was also exciting to me, having a group where I know they take it serious. I take this game very serious, from my off-season preparation, in season. So that was really exciting to me.

Q. Sam mentioned your desire to continue developing. What are those next steps for you in your game?

ISAIAH HARTENSTEIN: Yeah, just continue to get my shot. I feel like especially how they play here, I feel like I can still get a lot better defensively even though I had a great defensive year last year.

Just those little things and just being more comfortable. I think I'm very comfortable with the ball in my hands system probably be a little bit more, so just keep working on those little things.

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