

# Oklahoma City Thunder Media Conference

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

## Coach Mark Daigneault Press Conference



MARK DAIGNEAULT: Summertime we take very seriously trying to improve players, staff. Can't do that without the support from Mr. Bennett and Sam. As usual, there's really nothing that gets in our way from a resource standpoint. I always try to start off the top by thanking them. We had a great summer. We're excited to get going. I'll take whatever questions you guys have.

**Q. Has the goalpost moved at all for what you consider a successful season given the fact that you were the No. 1 seed in the West last season?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: No. The goalposts don't move based on anything other than our internal standards, our internal environment. When we started off with this version of the team four years ago, we tried to put things in place that could transcend any team, any season, any external noise or expectation.

I think we've done that well. Guys have done a great job with that to this point, and so we're doubling down on that. But, no, we haven't moved the goalposts.

**Q. I know this is difficult to measure, but adding guys like Isaiah, Alex, how much do you anticipate there may be trials, experimentation? How much do you anticipate getting you to where you may need to be?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Every year you have a new team. This year is no different. Those aren't the only new players we have. We have guys from the draft that are new. Every year you go into the training camp with the same goals, which are establish our on-court identity, build the habits that you are going to need throughout the season and in the biggest games, and then to understand what you have and allow every guy to show the strengths that they bring to the table and do so with a very open mind. We've taken that approach year after year.

That's our philosophy on this part of the season, and then even after the first game there's 81 more games, and we'll see how things evolve as we always do. But no predictions on that.

**Q. What are your early impressions of Isaiah (indiscernible)?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Just a really impressive guy. Serious professional that his whole life revolves around being the best basketball player that he can be. He takes it very seriously. That's very evident.

Then a really good guy that just wants to be one of the guys, loves the locker room, loves being on the team, loves being around the guys, coachable. He has made a great impression so far.

**Q. Another on Isaiah, are you looking at him as primarily the backup center, or are there times where you are kind of curious to see what it might look like in double big line-ups with him and Shai out there together?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: As I said before with the goals of camp, I just think the ball hasn't bounced yet. I think for me to come up here and talk about specific roles would be completely undermining the integrity of the training camp, which is to start anew and see where everybody is, see what strengths they bring to the team at this time.

It goes for the new players, and it also goes for the returning players that have worked hard over the summer and have probably evolved. I'm just not going to get ahead of myself.

**Q. What do you think (indiscernible)?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I don't think his offense is limited to his passing. I think that gets a lot of attention, but I think he's a really good offensive player for a number of reasons. I think the main one is he can really dictate the pace of the offense with the way he moves and the ball. He connects players, he connects sides of the floor.

He doesn't only do it with pace, but once he gets to the next action, he has great instincts for creating advantages as a screener. Not only because he is big and strong, but because he understands angles and who he is playing with.

If you watch him behave with Brunson, it's different than

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how he would behave with DiVincenzo. Really, really intelligent holistic offensive player, but has never played here. He has never played with this team, and so we have to see what that looks like. That stuff pops when you watch him play.

**Q. Obviously the addition of a player like Alex intrigues a lot of people in the outlook of this team. For you, when you remember hearing about it, what were some of your initial reactions? What was it like for Alex and the role defensively and offensively as well?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Caruso? Alex Ducas too. I know him well. We have a history together. As I said before, this is more about the future than it is about the past. The one thing that I remember about him that's held true throughout his career is he's moved on is he's always in the team and engaged in the moment of the game, and he is never out of character with those two things.

That was when he was in his first day as a rookie. He was like that.

Then when you watch him from a distance ever since then, that's what you see. He is always inside the team, and he is always in the moment, and those are hard qualities to maintain in the NBA.

I think we have other guys on our team that are like that, but he's always been like that. He continues to be like that.

**Q. Does it date me, or am I completely off base? Does he remind you any of Dave Cowens?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It dates you. To me Dave Cowens is the Hornets coach and a Celtics legend.

**Q. I don't mean as a coach or as an administrator. As a player.**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I would be completely -- Dave Cowens I think retired before I was born. I would have a hard time.

**Q. I bet he was (indiscernible).**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Especially the Celtics. I don't know. You answer the question. I would be interested in your thoughts.

**Q. Big, rugged, skilled, left-handed.**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I'll co-sign.

**Q. You guys shot threes very well last year, but the volume wasn't incredibly high. How do you balance volume and efficiency and leaning into your guys that some of your top players are better at driving?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: We're a couple of years removed from being the worst three-point shooting team in the league percentage-wise. One of the things that we really invested in to address that was shot selection and educating everybody on the team on what an efficient three-point shot was for them. They've done a great job of buying into that.

Now we need a reeducation of that, which is understanding what a great three-point shot is for you, including the ones that you're not taking. We have guys that obviously can really shoot with a good shot diet. There's a couple of them, if you look at the percentages, they'll tell you who they are that they can handle more volume and still maintain an efficiency above the waterline.

So it's an ongoing process, but we would much rather be a team that's highly efficient with the ones we take than a team that's inefficient with the ones we're taking. Now it's about continuing to evolve and find that balance, but that's a good question.

**Q. Defensively what's sort of your vision of what this team can be defensively? We feel like -- I know, like you said, training camp is when you discover things, but do you have a sense of what you may do better and maybe some areas that you are curious to see where this team evolves defensively?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: At this time of year, it's about the re-establishment of our identity, which is to compete together at both ends of the floor. Having that spirit is where defense starts. If you're not competing or you're not connected as a team, you have a really, really low ceiling as a defense.

Then understanding the habits that you need in order to be a good defense that are not changing, and that's simple. It's individual defense. It's help defense. It's communication of coverages. Re-establishing that is where you start.

If you can get that foundation built with strength as a team, then you can evolve from there in a lot of creative ways. We've done that in the past, but you just can't take the foundational part for granted this time of year. So I'm way more focused. As boring as that is, I'm way more focused on that than how we evolve.

**Q. Are you excited knowing all the pieces can evolve**

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**to something special?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I'm always excited this time of year. These guys are easy to be excited about, but mainly because of who they are, how they compete, how they prepare as professionals, the work they've put in over the summer. It's less thinking about the possibilities of schemes or matchups. It's more just being in front of them.

Again, they're an inspiring group of guys that I love being around. That's why I'm excited.

**Q. You guys have high-level guards in Cason, Dort, and Alex. What are some of the common threads between those guys (indiscernible)?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, all the guys -- I hate to make it sound like somebody is the student and somebody is the teacher. The guys do a great job when their skills overlap of working together in a team fashion to teach one another, to learn from one another. That environment has been built.

Alex will contribute to that, to your question. That's a very relevant skill to have overlap in the NBA. There's a lot of really talented players on the offensive end of the floor. When you have guys that can neutralize that to some degree or lower the efficiency of that, it's powerful. We're excited about that. We'll see where it goes.

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