

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

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Oklahoma City Thunder

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander

Media Day



Q. Shai, from the beginning of the rebuild to now, you and Sam [Presti] always seem to be sort of on the same page with what the plan was. Can you just explain maybe how that level of understanding between you guys got here?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: He's honest and upfront with me from day one. I think that helped our relationship right away. You don't get that very often, especially that early.

Seemed like a guy I can trust. He's been that. I just try to be the same back to him. Nothing more than just two guys with good character trusting each other and have one common goal in mind.

Q. I'm big into the mental side of basketball, sports, life, visualization, meditation. I want to know what do you do on the mental side of it to stay prepared, focused in these high-pressure situations?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Good question.

Honestly, I completely plug out. Like, I turn my TV off so there's no basketball highlights going. I don't watch basketball. Like, I just spend time with my family, my friends. I try to, like, remove myself completely from basketball because it just consumes so much of my life and my day.

Then when it's time to plug back into it, I'm eager to get back into like I missed it. Yeah, I just try to find a balance of plugging in and out of it.

Q. You have obviously handled your business very professionally this year. You also have a lot of fun. Do you think it's going to be difficult to keep that sense of fun even though you're now playing for the title? How will you guys stay true to who you are in this huge environment?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, I don't think we

have a choice. Staying true to who we are is the reason why we're here. We'd be doing ourselves as disservice if we changed or tried to be something worry not once we got here.

We've had success doing so. If we want to keep having success, we have to be who we are. It's organic. It's nothing we have to think about or force. It's just who we are, no matter the moment.

Q. There's four of you guys from Canada here this week, yourself, Lu [Dort], Andrew [Nembhard], Ben [Mathurin]. Briefly, what does it say about Canadian basketball, what it's going to be like battling against friends, teammates? When you look at your season, Steve Nash's legacy, where do you think what you've done builds on that?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Sorry, the first question was?

Q. What it's like battling against and with friends.

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, it will be fun. Like you said, playing with those guys, like I played against Andrew when I was nine years old. Like, it's been an amazing journey. To see him having success, my own success, obviously Lu's success, Ben's success, it's special. It's hard to even wrap your head around just kids that... There's so many kids that played in the same games that we played. For us to make it to this stage, is a testament to our hard work, our character, people around us that helped us get here.

It's been a blessing. It's been super fun.

What did you say about Steve?

Q. I know he's been a supporter of yours. We're not getting into a G.O.A.T. debate. What would it mean to take it to a next level, to win a title, on top of an MVP season?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: It would be amazing. Steve obviously is just a pioneer for Canadian basketball. He started the whole thing, I guess you can say. From the

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way he plays, to the way he carries himself, to his approach to the game, like, I learned so much from Steve being a 17-year-old kid in two weeks of time that helped me get here for sure.

The things he's done with Canada basketball as a whole and just pushing the culture forward is just amazing.

To win a title on top of everything that happened this year would be special. I said this so many times, I don't play for the individual stuff, I don't play for anything else besides winning. I never have in my whole life.

When I was nine-year-old I played to win a OBA championship. When I was 20 years old, I played to win the SEC Championship. Now I'm 26, I want to win the NBA championship. It's always about winning for me.

Q. You told us after Game 7 in the Denver series you had been nervous in the day or two leading up to it. What are you feeling as the series approaches? How is it difficult to plug in and out this week?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, it's been a little bit different in that situation. A situation I've never been in before obviously. It's been fun. As these Playoffs go on, you get better in controlling the situations, controlling your emotions. You understand what's coming.

But it's been fun. Like the opportunities here, it's been a long week to wait, feels like the days have gone slow. Yeah, I just, like, figured out how to navigate through all the emotions and the nerves and the waiting process, which is just plugging into my loved ones, try not to think about it so much, stress about it so much, just enjoy life and stay in the moment.

Q. You guys have had an historic season so far. Have you had a moment to reflect on being on the doorstep of history in this time since the conference finals have ended? Do you have a chance to even appreciate getting here, appreciate how dominant this team has been this season?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Honestly, not really. I've been so focused on, like, just Game 1. Trying to be the best version of myself for this group and trying to make sure that we're clicking on all cylinders on the biggest stage of our careers has been on the forefront of my mind and all I do worry about when I worry about basketball.

To answer your question, I haven't really taken the time to look back, see all the things we've done. But I will when it's all over, for sure.

Q. You guys have faced some fantastic offenses. Now you deal with the Pacers. What challenges do they pose that may be different from what you've seen so far?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: Yeah, like you said, every team has their strengths and their weaknesses. They're a very fast team. I think, like, above all, they understand how they're playing and they're very, like, stubborn in their approach. They kind of like grind you with the way they play. They wear you down.

You don't get here without being a really good team on both ends. They're that. We know that coming into the game. But yeah, they know their identity and they stick to it, no matter what.

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