

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

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Oklahoma City Thunder

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander

Practice Day



Q. Shai, does it feel any different being on the cusp of a chance to win a title, given you've been chasing this for a couple years? Do any of your experiences with the national team enter into your experiences in terms of how you might face this situation?

SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER: Yeah, it doesn't feel much different, to be honest. Trying to stay in the moment. Trying to focus on the things that actually matter.

I think just us focusing on trying to be the best version of ourselves for Game 6. Having that at the top of my mind is all that really matters.

Yeah, for sure those type of games, do or die games, you only get one chance -- a lot of the times we start a certain way. In the France game, just from recent memory, they started a certain way. Although we tried to climb back in it, they had control of the whole game because of that. Those experiences definitely helped me in my experiences going forward.

Q. It's 3 2. How rewarding has it been the way you guys have done this? You knew you would take lumps for a couple years, then the last two years have been what they've been. To do it that way, grow organically, how rewarding has the process been?

SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER: It's been fun. The cusp of winning is not winning. The way I see it, winning is all that matters. It hasn't been fulfilled. We haven't done anything, the way I see it.

I built great friendships along the way. Had a lot of fun playing basketball. I think that's where you start. The organization and the guys around me have done a really good job of building an environment that is fun to come to every day. Really just focus on working and getting better. I think that's why we made jumps.

Q. With the individual accomplishments you've had this season, the team accomplishments, you're a win

away from putting the finishing touches on a season that's in the special category historically. How do you wrap your mind around that?

SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER: Focusing on Game 6. Focusing on just being the best version of myself for this basketball team, for whatever it takes, for however many games it is, however many possessions is needed, however many moments.

Ultimately I'm just trying to stay in the moment. I think that's what's gotten me here. That's what has helped me achieve the MVP award, achieve all the things I've achieved. It's helped this team win basketball games. Trying to stick to that script and focusing on winning basketball games.

Q. This league has a history of tandems. Two stars on a team that take a team to its heights. You're team players, but within that how do you look at the dynamic that you and Jalen have developed and are still developing?

SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER: Yeah, it's been fun so far. I think both of us just trust each other, have the same mindset, winning mindset, want the best for each other above all. Me and him are also naturally really good friends. We talk all the time on and off the court. Always together. That helps with it, for sure.

Then we just use our experiences together to grow. Whether I see something, he sees something, whether we feel something in the moment both being out there. We just use everything together to grow on and off the court. It's helped us so far.

Q. You have won all sorts of ways. To what extent are the players beginning to contribute to the reading and feedback into the coaching staff? Who are the connectors when these big changes are made in game that make sure everybody is on the same page? Who are the middle linebackers that keep everybody on form?

SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER: So the coaches make the calls obviously. Honestly, the rest of us -- the coaches

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do a really good job of making things simple out there. They give us a few things when we go out there to try to take care of every possession. We just go out there and play off of those few things and our feel for the game.

I think it's a luxury to have the guys on the team we have, with the natural basketball feel and understanding of the game. That makes that easier. What you just described, it's never that complicated for us. We go out there, we have concepts on both ends of the floor that we play through. We try to make the best and aggressive decision through those concepts.

Your second question, I forgot what it was.

Q. (No microphone.)

SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER: I think we all do our part. Everybody on the team. The thing about this team is we're very open and honest with each other. If we don't understand something, if we don't know what's going on, it's easy to ask a question. It's easy to help. We're always talking to each other. Everyone is always informed. It's a whole group effort.

Q. A couple years ago Mark talked about a competitive empathy, understanding what your team is going through physically, mentally, and also what your opponent is going through. How have you established that over the years to where you understand where your opponent is at and where you are at?

SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER: Coach has done a really good job over the years of highlighting and really putting emphasis on the things that matter and the things that you can control in a basketball game. Your mental approach is one of them. He's always been big on those type of things.

I think honestly now it's like a trained muscle. He does a really good job of always thinking big picture and zooming out of the moment.

Even if we're in a losing season a couple years ago, and I don't approach the game the right way, he pulled me aside after and explained to me it's a muscle that I'm going to have to build, something that I can't turn off and on, and I have to approach it a certain way.

I think that's his biggest strength as a coach. He understands the game, then he understands how to connect with players and give them the right information to benefit themselves and ultimately benefit this team. That's all coach, to answer your question. He has prepared us great in that way.

Q. I know you're focused on trying to win tomorrow instead of some of the more reflective stuff. When you were going through that historic regular season, after the games you guys would say it's just part of a process. When you're going through that process, are you thinking about where you are now, envisioning that? Is this what it looked like to you then or are you really focused on the day to day stuff at the time?

SHAI GILGEOUS ALEXANDER: Really focused on the day to day things. You don't ever know what life is going to throw at you. I've just learned that over time. This is me personally, trying to picture what it's going to look like or feel like, for me it's kind of pointless. Honestly, I try to make it an emphasis not to do so. Obviously I'm human, so I naturally think about my dreams and my goals. As much as I can and as well as I can, I try to focus on the day to day, focus on what's gotten me to my dreams and my goals. That's where I hang my hat.

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