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NO	91	IND	92	MIN	82	ATL	69	TOR	50	DEN	15	LAC	Today
OKC	101	CHI	88	DAL	72	SA	90	UTA	50	SAC	13	LAL	10:30pm ET
Boxscore	4th 0:19	Boxscore	4th 1:12	Boxscore	4th 10:04	Boxscore	4th 6:45	Boxscore	Halftime	Boxscore	1st 5:42	Matchup	

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Tuesday, January 24th, 2012 at 11:49 am | 2 responses

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Q+A: Mehmet Okur

The Turkish big man dishes on his move from Salt Lake to New York.

by Kyle Stack / @KyleStack

Mehmet Okur isn't Brook Lopez. However, the Nets' current starting center has taken the place of the team's injured former starting center to become one of point guard Deron Williams' primary targets. With Lopez out until at least mid-February as he recovers from surgery on his non-displaced stress fracture of the fifth metatarsal in his right foot, Okur will hold down the 5-spot for awhile yet.

The ex-Detroit Piston and Utah Jazz was traded from the Jazz December 22nd for only a second-round pick. Word is that Williams, who played with Okur for nearly six seasons in Salt Lake City, requested Okur to be acquired. The Turkish big man is struggling, as his averages of 7.4 points and 4.7 rebounds pale in comparison to his career averages of 13.5 points and 7.0 'boards.

I caught Okur last Wednesday while he was in the Nets' locker room watching film on that night's opponent, the Golden State Warriors. Okur and I discussed players going overseas, how he feels physically after tearing his left Achilles tendon last season and what he can find in New York City that he couldn't get in Salt Lake City.



SLAM: What's it been like moving from Salt Lake City to New York?

Mehmet Okur: Yeah, it's just been, you know, bringing everything over here. It's still brand new for me. It's been, what, a month, less than a month. And it's been really, just first time I heard, when I heard I got traded, I was kind of shocked, disappointed, but I'm experienced enough to get used to it and move on. I knew the players I'd be playing with from before in the past. I feel a lot better than the first time I got here, so I'm still learning about the system, players, city, off the floor. I'm gonna be OK.

SLAM: You obviously played with Deron (Williams), and at times with DeShawn (Stevenson) and Kris (Humphries), in Utah. Do you think you could've made a transition to a new team as easily if you hadn't had former teammates on the team?

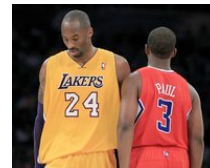
MO: It could've been a lot tougher if I had no teammates on previous teams, so they make my job a lot easier on and off the floor. They're helping me out every day, and it just makes me feel a lot better.

SLAM: What's the primary difference—I'm sure there are many—of living in New York City versus in Salt Lake?

MO: Ohhh, it's quiet there. The traffic and everybody is '15 minutes here.' People have a different culture. You're going to have traffic, you're gonna have to make your plans before you go anywhere [in New York City]. I'm glad I have a sister in town. She's been helping me a lot; my wife and kids. Friends I know here.

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At home we have to wipe the snow off our windshields.



BALL IS LIFE

Marquette-bound Steve Taylor (#1 ranked Illinois 2012) leads

SLAM: There's a lot more Turkish restaurants here than in Salt Lake, huh?

MO: So many. There's not one in Salt Lake.

SLAM: None? I guess you'd have to go to Denver for that.

MO: No, it's more like L.A., Vegas, San Francisco.

SLAM: Did you give any advice to Deron before he played in Turkey?

MO: Yeah, he's my neighbor in San Diego because he lives, like, five minutes away from me. I mean, he's obviously a good friend of mine off the floor. We've been talking and seeing each other in the off-season. First time he got the offer, he called me and asked me about Istanbul and [Besiktas]. Then the team's GM came by in San Diego; I was at the same dinner with them. So we just talked about shared thoughts, told him he was going to be okay, just go out there, the people love you over there, you're going to have great food.

SLAM: NBA players have mixed experiences overseas. Ty Lawson went to Lithuania and didn't enjoy it. Other guys do enjoy it. What does it take for a player to go overseas and adjust to a different culture?

MO: Obviously the people, right now, they feel better to go out there and play more than they used to feel. People are afraid to go out there because they have no experience to go play there. It's the first time in their life and they don't know what's going on. I understand. There are more NBA players going overseas and some people don't like to eat different food. Some people like to taste different food, and they like it. Most players I talk to love the Turkish food and the people over there and the culture.

SLAM: I think that some players are probably intimidated by the crowds and how different they are than in the US.

MO: The fans are, basically, they are standing all game long. They're jumping. They're yelling at you. They throw stuff on the floor sometimes. For some reason, they do it. Coins, stuff like that. And they don't want to lose the game. They're too into the game sometimes. The culture and also they go cheer for soccer games, too. So many people are standing and jumping up and down.

SLAM: How are you feeling this season with the truncated schedule?

MO: You know, I really took advantage of the summer. I was hurt last year, mostly. I took advantage of the lockout. I was able to sign with a Turkish team and played three months out there and be able to play at a high level again. It was fun. It's good to be back out there, play at high level basketball, came back in good shape and it looks like a tough schedule. We play almost every day. I should be okay, though.

SLAM: I think some people feel that since you've been playing basketball all your life, why can't you just handle the schedule? I'm not sure if they understand the physical toll this takes.

MO: I don't think they understand what we've been through—days, years. This is my 10th year [in the NBA]. The people think everything is easy, like we just go out there and play. Behind the scenes, we fly every other day, practice almost every other day. There's so much going on, meetings, stuff like that. So, there's so much going on and it's a tough schedule.

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2 Responses to "Q+A: Mehmet Okur"

Dreezy Posted: Jan.24 at 8:41 pm

Memo we miss you in SL bro.. Wish you the best in the apple and wherever else you play.. Dont let these bozos try to convince you that the GSLC is anything less than it is.. We love you over here Memo

Ryan Posted: Jan.25 at 9:00 am

Stay healthy and goofy Memo.

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