



Just as he's done throughout his first two seasons in the NBA, Chandler Parsons has continued to improve every step of the way through his initial foray into the world of NBA playoff basketball. The 24-year-old's numbers have spiked through each of his first four games thus far, culminating with a monster 27-point, 10-rebound, 8-assist performance that carried the Rockets to a season-saving win in Game 4 of their first round matchup against the Oklahoma City Thunder.

With his team prepping to once again fight for its playoff life, Rockets.com's Jason Friedman sat down with Parsons for an exclusive interview to talk about life in the playoff spotlight, playing in high-pressure situations and of course, his oft-discussed sense of style. What follows is the transcript of that conversation.

JCF: Do you feel as if the last couple weeks have been a bit of a national coming out party for you? You hit that crazy buzzer-beater against the Lakers in the season finale that even prompted Lindsay Lohan to send a tweet in your direction, the big spread in the style section of the Houston Chronicle and a huge Game 4 performance to keep the Rockets' season alive. Does it seem like you're getting more attention than ever?

CP: Don't forget the guy I left hanging with the fist bump because that got more attention than

anything ...

JCF: (laughs) How could I forget? I noticed you even tweeted out an apology to him yesterday.

CP: Oh man, I felt so bad because I really didn't see the guy. I'm hoping there's a Game 6 so I can dap him up every single timeout. But yeah, it's been good. A lot of people around the country haven't gotten to see us play or see what I can do and the kind of year I had. They just kind of look at the numbers and see the stats.

But I think it's important that we're now on national TV and we're basically in prime time every game. I'm playing well, I'm leading our team and obviously we're down in the series right now but we're never giving up and I think it's showing just how tough our team is and how, even though we're really young, we have a lot of potential and we've got something really exciting going on. From a fan perspective, this series has been so exciting with how close the games have been and how back-and-forth it's been and down to the wire. So we're definitely getting a lot of attention and I'm benefitting from that but I think it's deserved and we'll get even more as we grow together.

JCF: You mentioned the way you're leading team and it definitely seemed in Game 4 that you came out with the specific intent to set the tone and send a message to everyone that, win or lose, your team wasn't going down without a fight. I don't want to put words

in your mouth, so you tell me: what was your approach for that game?

CP: I just came out aggressive. I don't want to make our team easy to guard and I don't want us to be stagnant and bogged down so everybody can focus on James. When they play the Rockets, I want them to be focused on everybody and especially me, so I want to be aggressive right from the start and if I'm open I'm going to take the shot, if I'm not I'm going to try to put pressure on them by making plays for others.

The first two games I felt like I was just kind of feeling it out. I had zero assists in the first two games and I wasn't really getting my teammates involved. So the last two games I've just been trying to make it easier for everybody else and just be ultra aggressive because of how good they are offensively and how good of a team they are. I feel like I can expose them defensively, though, because when we go small and they have a big guy on me, they can't guard me.

JCF: You mentioned the occasional stagnation on offense. That's obviously been a big issue of late. Do you think it's a result of a young team trying to figure things out and find its identity on the fly? More importantly, how do you fix it going forward, especially this time of year?

CP: I'm not sure. I guess one way to limit it would be to just get more stops so we're able to get out more in transition and don't have to bring the ball up slowly. But I think sometimes we get worried about what they're doing; when they score we feel we have to get a good shot and for

us to get a good shot we have to slow it down and run a play – that's not who we are and that doesn't necessarily work.

I think that our biggest trait on offense is our defense, and when Omer gets the rebound or when I get the rebound and we push it out, that's when we're at our best. So it's tough when they're shooting high percentages because that takes some of our transition game away. But there's no real reason, with our personnel and the way we play with our talent in transition that we should slow the ball down and run half-court sets.

JCF: What's the biggest thing that has surprised you about the difference between playoff basketball and regular season basketball?

CP: I would just say the crowds. The atmospheres have been unbelievable. I heard it's way more physical and you can get away with more stuff in the playoffs, but that's not true at all. It's just not. It's almost less. Obviously the NBA game is very physical, but that's the biggest thing I heard coming in was that it was going to be way more physical in the playoffs and way more fouling and I just feel like it's not like that at all. I just feel like the crowds are ridiculous and I feel like the emotions of the players are at an all-time high and every single possession matters. And like Coach McHale said the other day: on a Tuesday night in February in some random city, it just doesn't feel like that.

JCF: You're starting to develop a reputation as a guy who performs best when the lights

are brightest and a guy capable of hitting big shots in crunch time. Do you see yourself a clutch player?

CP: I'm not ever scared to take a shot. I always want the ball at the end of the quarter or at the end of a game, and that goes back to college. In Florida, I hit a few game winners where I just wanted the ball and I can live with myself if I miss a game-winner because I practice that shot so many times and I work so hard at my game. But I just want that opportunity to be in that situation and I feel like, when I get that, I take advantage of it and I think that's just part of my character: I'm fearless, I want the ball in those situations where I can try to win the game for my team.

JCF: Speaking of reputations and character, you've also clearly garnered some attention for your sense of style. At the podium last game you came out wearing a classic suit and shirt but no tie. My question for you, then, is this: Did you go tieless to make a statement, or because you don't actually know how to tie a tie?

CP: (laughs) I don't know how to tie a tie. You got me there. I just wanted to go with the classier, simple look last game. Tonight that's not the story.

JCF: Oh really?

Q&A with Chandler Parsons on leadership, clutch play and winning with style Jason Friedman

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CP: Yeah, so I'm hoping for a big win so I can get up there and show you what I'm working with tonight.

JCF: Well it's good to see that your priorities and motivations are in the right place.

CP: Hey listen: I'm focused on the game but you've got to look good afterwards, too.