

# BETWEEN THE LINES

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## Behavioral Triple Double on Thomas's Hip: Rejections, Protests and Qualifiers

### Introduction

At BIA, we typically apply our proprietary Tactical Behavioral Assessment® (TBA™) methodology to analyze management teams' statements and provide insight into the completeness, transparency and confidence surrounding all types of business issues. In this edition of *Between the Lines*, we turn our attention to the NBA and a recent blockbuster trade. On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, news broke that the Boston Celtics had traded Isaiah Thomas (along with Jae Crowder, Ante Zizic and a 2018 first-round pick) to the Cleveland Cavaliers in exchange for finals hero and disgruntled point guard Kyrie Irving. But the deal almost fell apart after Cleveland's physical examination of Thomas's torn labrum raised questions about the timeline for his return next season. With Cleveland threatening to veto the trade, Boston agreed to include an additional draft pick and the deal was finalized on August 30<sup>th</sup>. However, Cleveland fans remain justifiably concerned about the severity of Thomas's injury, given high expectations that he can effectively replace their All-Star point guard. During the press conference officially introducing the new Cavaliers, general manager Koby Altman and Thomas exhibited a number of concerning behaviors related to the injury. These behaviors lead BIA to conclude that the injury is more severe and will require a longer recovery than the Cavaliers want to disclose. Additionally, behaviors suggest that surgery remains an option, which would lengthen the recovery timetable still further.

### Refusals to Provide Information

From the first question posed in the press conference, Altman attempts to shut down any questions related to the hip injury. When Thomas is asked how the hip is doing and what the timetable is for when he can play, he laughs and gestures to Altman with his thumb. This suggests that Thomas and Altman were prepared for questions on the injury and crafted a plan for their responses ahead of time, indicating there is more to the story than they want to reveal. Altman goes on to say that they are "not going to address any specifics of the hip injury" and they are also "not going to put a timetable on his return." Since the trade almost fell through due to this injury, the refusal to provide any specifics raises significant concerns. Reporters seem to agree, and they repeatedly slip in questions related to the hip throughout the press conference. In each case, Altman shuts down the line of questioning, at one point saying that he does not "want this to be the Isaiah Thomas hip press conference." Altman's failure to put the matter to rest by providing clarity on a timetable or facts about the injury indicates that the injury is likely significantly more severe than the Cavaliers want to acknowledge.

### Clues in the Crafted Message

After refusing to answer the first question on the injury, Altman tries to enhance perceptions of the possibility of a quick return by protesting that they "have some of the best doctors in the world at the Cleveland Clinic" and "some of the best performance team in the league," which he insists "has a well-thought-out plan." However, the credibility of this message is diminished by his repeated protest throughout the press conference that they are "not going to rush it at all." This refrain represents a concerted effort to prepare fans for the possibility of a long recovery. Altman says that "the goal" is to bring Thomas back "at some point this year" and

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“by the playoffs.” This falls well short of asserting that they expect Thomas back this season, suggesting management has significant doubts that he will be able to make his return prior to the playoffs, if at all.

## Efforts to Deflect Attention

In lieu of providing any information on the hip injury, Altman tries to deflect attention to other areas. He pleads with reporters to ask “about Isaiah the All-Star... Isaiah the guy that averaged 29 points a game last year” and “what he’s going to bring to this franchise in terms of his performance on the floor.” This is meant to distract from the injury and instead enhance expectations for his performance when he does return to the court. He also tries to enhance expectations about the team’s backup point guards, protesting that the team is “very fortunate to have signed Derrick Rose” and that Jose Calderone has “been in the gym every day since... [they] acquired him.” Using the word “fortunate” is especially notable; it suggests they likely have new information that makes the signing of Rose even more important than they had initially anticipated. Head Coach Tyrone Lue later echoes these protests in responding to another question, saying that Rose will be “able to step in and play those minutes until Isaiah gets back and gets healthy” and calling Calderone a “very steady player, who doesn’t turn the basketball over” and “a great shooter, great free throw shooter.” These protests are meant to downplay concerns about the team’s performance prior to Thomas’s return. The need to do so provides further evidence that the team’s management expects Thomas’s road back to the court to be a long one.

## Is Surgery a Possibility?

Altman is asked whether they are refusing to provide a timeline because they do not have one or because they do not want to reveal it. He fails to directly answer, returning to the initial crafted message that the “goal” is to “get him back to 100%” and that the performance team has a “great plan, a multi-faceted plan to really attack this thing.” But he then says that “day by day, as he gets better” he thinks they will “have a better grasp of it” and let the public know. This suggests that they do not currently have a timeframe. The reporter follows up, saying “it doesn’t sound like you have a date in mind yet,” which Altman fails to deny. This suggests that the team is reluctant to reveal their uncertainty about the timeline. One reason for their hesitancy could be that surgery is still on the table. When Altman is asked about the “possibility” of surgery, he responds that the “plan is a non-surgical plan.” This is meant to convince fans that surgery is not an option they are considering, but it is notable that he fails to specifically confirm this. Thomas follows up this response by quipping, “Y’all hear that? Everybody wanna be doctors now.” This joke suggests that Thomas feels a heightened sensitivity regarding any potential surgery and that it is likely a possibility if the current plan fails to result in sufficient progress. Collectively, the behaviors displayed throughout the press conference suggest that Thomas’s injury is worse than the team wants to acknowledge and that they have significant doubts about his ability to return to the court by the playoffs, especially since surgery is still a viable possibility.

**About this Report:**

This report represents the application of BIA's Tactical Behavior Assessment® methodology and reflects BIA's assessment of the completeness and responsiveness of statements made during earnings conference calls, television interviews and other presentations. In each case, our assessment represents the opinion of BIA applying the Tactical Behavior Assessment® methodology and does not purport to indicate that any individual is in any specific instance being truthful or deceptive. BIA does not make stock recommendations. Under no circumstances is BIA's analysis intended to be a recommendation to buy or sell the securities of the company which is the subject of this report.

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