

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Monday, June 16, 2025

Oklahoma City Thunder

Mark Daigneault

Game 5: Postgame

Oklahoma City Thunder 120, Indiana Pacers 109

Q. I don't know where you'd rank this game for Dub's career. What did you see from him? What do you think allowed him to get out and run?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Great force. I mean, that's the word. We've used that word with him in his development. When he's at his best he's playing with that type of force.

That was an unbelievable performance by him, just throughout the whole game. He really was on the gas the entire night. Applied a ton of pressure. Thought he made a lot of the right plays. We're going to need a similar type of approach in Game 6 from him.

Q. What did you think of the crowd tonight?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, unreal. I mean, they've been unreal forever. They just put the wind at our back.

We have to give them a reason to. We have to play with the type of togetherness and competitiveness and spirit that they can relate to, which I thought we did tonight.

But it's an unbelievable lift for us to be home.

Q. Can you hear each other out there? You're barking instructions. What is that like?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, less than the regular season, but enough. We're getting the stuff in.

Q. You're trading punches in the fourth quarter with them. You go up eight. You had the four steals in a row. Walk me through those defensive possessions, how fitting it was to see the game really secured with your defense.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I thought our defense tonight was really good. I thought our conversion off of our defense was hit or miss. We had some really good



moments. We had some moments that I wish we could have back.

The second-chance points were a major problem. They did a great job of crashing to the glass. They beat us in the paint tonight. It wasn't a perfect game at all. There's a lot of room for growth. But I thought our improvement from Game 4 to Game 5 was critical. We're going to need a similar type of approach. We got to take the humility to understand there's still a lot we can get better at if we want to go on the road and win game.

Q. You just mentioned improvement. The offensive process, what did you make of that, the 24 assists, 10 by Shai, the sheer way that you scored?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I thought we took a step forward there. We took some steps forward tonight, we took some backward. That's natural. You're not going to be perfect in everything but offensively we took some steps forward in our approach.

Defensively, I thought we were pretty good. I thought McConnell really changed the game in the third. Obviously, that was blatant. We got to do a better job there. We got to do a better job on the glass. Late-game defensive transition, they kept the pressure on us there.

So we have room for growth. But I thought we took some steps forward on the other end.

Q. Coming into the season, the thought was that either Dub or Chet was going to have to step forward to be the second guy next to Shai to get you guys to this level. Was there anything before the season or during the season where you were sort of surprised about Dub or was it through the Playoffs?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Respectfully we don't look at it like that in terms of second guy, first guy, third guy, anything like that. We're just trying to help every guy grow and improve and tackle the next thing in front of them.

Dub is a third-year player. Chet is a third-year player. Cason Wallace is a second-year player. We're just trying to help those guys take steps forward, wherever they are at

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a given moment. That's everybody on the roster, Caruso, Kenrich Williams, all the way down.

When you do that, when the guys commit to that, they improve. I think tonight a lot of the things that Dub got in the game tonight are things we talked about earlier in the season. He wasn't having games like this in November, December. His focus on the improvement led him to being the player he is right now.

Again, these guys can be ready to go on the road. We got to be ready, as well.

Q. It seemed like Shai provided a calming influence down the stretch. A hockey assist to Dub, about eight minutes left. You took him out. He came back in, got another assist. What did you think of his game? How did he settle things when they were coming back?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, they had a really good offensive second half. Defensively there's things we can learn. I mentioned McConnell in the third. In the fourth even I think they had 30 points or 33 points. We need to improve there.

Our offense kind of paced us down the stretch. He's such a big part of that because he's in such command of the ball. Dub was doing that tonight, too, which is more against their pressure.

Thought those guys played really well in the two-man game. Controlled the clock, controlled the game down the stretch, paced us ahead of them.

Q. I talked to you last series about how both J-Dub and Shai use the phrase, be where your feet are. How will you continue to hold tight to that phrase heading to Indiana?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: We have to, as we have all year. We have to focus on improving. We're playing a game. We have to get better in the areas. We have to improve. Indiana is going to do that. That's part of a series. That's how you pace ahead of a series, you keep improving. We got to go up there and focus on what we focus on, which is the next game, the next possession, and where we are.

The guys have done an amazing job of that. But these games are a challenge. We want to win these games. It can pull you into the future, can pull you into the past. We got to stay present and compete together in every possession of the game.

Q. You mentioned the practice after Game 1 that typically for third-year guys delivering in the Finals

isn't on the curriculum.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yep.

Q. Why do you think Dub has been able to come through the way he has?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: These guys are really good players, obviously. But I go back to the improvement. There's times earlier in the season where he had some ugly plays, ugly games, trying to establish the type force you saw tonight. I complimented him back then. But he's trying to make an All-Star team. He's an All NBA player this season. He's got an individual career that he's ambitious.

The way that you accomplish your goals and become the player you're going to be is by improving. I credit him because in the face of all those things, he just focused on improving. Now in the face of going up to Indiana, up 3-2, we have to focus on improving. That's got to be our mindset. We have to discipline ourselves to do that.

Q. Back to the question about the crowd. Seems like when there are lulls in many of the games, the crowd starts making noises. I don't know if you feel like it's a correlation. Seems, like, that pushes you to the next level. Do you feel that or the players feel that?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: You can ask them. Again, I think the crowd puts the wind at our back. I always marvel at how enthusiastic and positive they remain in the ebbs and flows of a game or a season. They're always trying to put the wind at our back, always trying to lift the team up. I just think that's a great spirit that's on display in all these games. They were amazing tonight, obviously.

Q. Jalen, is this the kind of game you envisioned for him? Could you comment, you got the turnovers tonight, but you also got the points to go with it, 32.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I thought our conversion tonight was better. I thought there were also some plays where we were a little hasty in transition. We can clean that up. We have to attack with intelligence after our stops. We can improve that a little bit.

But yeah, Jalen again, I don't know if this is what I envisioned, but we're just trying to help guys grow from wherever they are at a given point in time. He's committed to that process. He's not the only one. He had the loudest game. We have a culture of that. Our guys do an amazing job of just staying present in their career, staying present in the season, just attacking what's right in front of them.

Q. I was wondering, on potential challenges, there

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seem to be a number of calls that you might have thought about challenging. What was your thinking? It wasn't just one or two, it seemed like there were a number of them.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: You're always just focused on trying to get it right. You don't want to burn one on a play that could be marginal or could be interpreted in a certain way, try to keep it in your pocket unless it's one that you can really go get.

Q. Aaron Wiggins seemed to put a real emphasis on putting up shots, threes in transition. Was that something that you felt like you guys had to emphasize, was a better way to get threes in transition? What did you think of the looks you got?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, we shot 17 threes in Game 4. That's not really a recipe. It's a byproduct of offense that's not where it needs to be. I thought we made some improvements tonight.

I thought Wigs and Cason Wallace specifically, in the first half, gave us a major lift. Came in aggressive. Wiggs only played eight minutes in Game 4. I didn't think Cason played great in Game 4. They both came ready to go tonight and gave us a massive lift. We're going to need that type of aggressiveness and confidence from everybody. They gave it to us tonight.

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