

# Emirates NBA Cup

Saturday, December 14, 2024

## Houston Rockets

### Ime Udoka

Semifinal Postgame



Oklahoma City Thunder 111, Houston Rockets 96

**Q. The way they packed the paint, are there ways you would have rather attacked it, or is it a matter of getting the threes that you guys put up to go?**

IME UDOKA: Yes, it sometimes comes down to making shots. You know, especially in the first half, we guarded well enough, holding them to 41. If you make a few shots, you're probably up double figures.

The other way we like to attack is get stops and get out. I think that's when we built our biggest lead, the seven-point lead. We got some stops and got out in transition. So we won those areas, offensive rebounds, transition. Obviously, individuals got to shoot the ball a little bit better and you're in a good spot. But you put a lot of pressure on your defense when you're not making shots like that.

**Q. I think this is now the third game this month you guys have scored under a hundred points. Is it as simple as not hitting the open threes, or are there other things that are not clicking offensively?**

IME UDOKA: A little bit of both. The turnovers hurt us in the first half. Like I said, when we built the seven-point lead, we had back-to-back turnovers that got them out in transition where they hit a three, and the lead kind of dissipated pretty quickly.

Taking care of the ball against a team that packs the paints and gets a lot of steals and turnovers, that would help. But sometimes, like I said, it just comes down to making shots. If they are going to dare you to make shots, wide-open looks, you've got to hit those.

But we try to play with faster pace and crash the offensive glass, like we did all year, and that kept us afloat until our defense kind of broke down in the third quarter.

**Q. To that point, I was going to ask you was the biggest thing that shifted in the second half that they started to knock down some shots, or did they do anything differently to create some of those break**

**downs that you mentioned defensively?**

IME UDOKA: I think the turnovers helped them get out a little bit and get going. But they did make some more shots. I think they were 2-for-18 at halftime. We were 4-for-19. Both teams were missing, and they were the team to start making them more so.

To hold them to 41 in the first half and give up 34 in that quarter, our defense started to give up a little bit there. We scored 27, so we actually were scoring better in that quarter. They got it going from three and that was a major difference. Fouls on three-pointers hurt us, too. Nine points on three fouls on three-point shooters. So that was the difference in that third quarter.

**Q. You've talked about the benefits you hope to find in some of these Cup games, the atmosphere and so on. What do you want your guys to take from this or to learn from this?**

IME UDOKA: It's a heightened situation. It's a playoff atmosphere, and everybody is playing to move on obviously. So you've got to bring your "A" game.

Obviously when you look at the stats, look down the stat sheet, I would say Amen and Tari really brought their "A" game off the bench. Other than that, we really struggled, from the starters. You have to play better in certain situations like this. Once SGA and Williams and Dort hit some big threes, once they got it going in the second half, that was really the difference. A few of their guys scored the ball better than ours.

**Q. You talked about trying to play with pace. I think there was a moment in the fourth quarter where you were down 84-79, and then they go on 8-0 run. Do you recall what was wrong in that stretch?**

IME UDOKA: Fred got a wide-open three in transition that would have cut it to two. Like you said, they were up 84-79. He had a wide-open three from the high quadrant that would cut it to 82-84. Missed that, and they get out on the break again.

It was more of the same, honestly, that really hurt us in that

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quarter. Battled our way back. Had not been playing well. We talked about in that timeout they called, it's a five-point game and we haven't really played well at all, especially offensively. To see it go back the other way was due to some of our errors. But we also missed some wide-open shots, especially in transition.

**Q. Broader question, yesterday Jabari was talking about last year maybe having expectations to be good right away and maybe skipping steps a little bit. This season, how have you seen those steps maybe not be skipped and maybe just doing it the right way, I guess you could say?**

IME UDOKA: We have a year under our belt that we saw what worked well for us and so we could kind of reiterate those same points, and guys haven't done it for the first time. I don't think there was a stress on us to be good right away last year. That wasn't really the expectation. It was to take a step, which we did, going from 22 to 41 wins, and being more competitive overall. But our goal was the playoffs. We fell a little short of that, but it wasn't any added pressure on them as far as that.

I think we made the right steps, and then came to this year obviously doing more of the same. Another year under our belt and seeing success late in the season last year really helped propel us at the start of the season.

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