

Emirates NBA Cup

Saturday, December 14, 2024

Oklahoma City Thunder

Mark Daigneault

Semifinal Postgame



OKC Thunder 111, Houston Rockets 96

Q. The first half was a slog for both teams, but you scored 70 points, 58 percent shooting in the second half. What did you do at a higher level from an execution standpoint offensively in the second half?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I thought our defense in the first half kept us in the game. For us to shoot that poorly, I think we were 2-for-18 from three, and to be down by one was fortunate.

I thought our force on offense in the second half was much better. We kind of relied on jump shots in the early part of that game. We got a little better in the second quarter, but when you rely on jump shots, you're relying on the highest variance shot in the game, and I didn't think we tested the paint and tested transition enough.

In the second half we got a little bit more of that and more shots fell, which I think is correlated. Obviously, a great response against a really good defense to have 70 points.

Q. I think this was a week ago we were talking about Shai and how he maybe responded to the Pelicans' defense in that game. What did you see half to half from him in terms of the way he read some things they were doing and maybe what he took himself?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, he struggles just like any other player, and he struggled in the first half to find it.

The thing that always impresses me about him is he just has an unwavering confidence. Regardless of what's going on in the game, his confidence stays at the same level. He continues to play, and the game usually comes around for him because he keeps his head in it and he's a great player, and that's what happened in the second half.

Q. It probably comes as no surprise to you that Lu Dort would play like he did to shoot and play with intensity on the defensive end. What did you see from him?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I was just talking to Sam. Sam said he thought the play of the game was when he dove on the floor there; it was like a tone setter. The game was kind of like a little muddled before that.

It's never a surprise. He always brings his fastball. He brings his fastball every night, but the bigger the game doesn't change that as all. I thought his physicality tonight, his effort tonight, obviously made some big shots, as well, he's been in these situations, and he always sticks his nose in the competition, and tonight was no different.

Q. Winning the turnover battle again tonight, it's a broken record with this team, this time against another club known for their defense. How important is that becoming to this club's identity, especially in these sort of, like, big games like NBA Cup games?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, it's never an end game for us. We're just trying to be disruptive and disciplined, and we were disruptive tonight. I thought we did a really good job on their main guys. I thought our individual D on those guys was great. Our shot contesting was great. Our help was great. Usually when you do that you can force tough shots or turnovers, and we were able to force both tonight. We had a great defensive game.

Q. Obviously you guys have been elite defensively all year, but what makes you guys so comfortable in those games when you're going up against another pretty good defensive team, too?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, that's what defense does for you. It keeps you in games. You're never really out of it. The first half was a great example of that. I don't think we've struggled that much offensively all season, a combination of their defense, they did a great job on us, and our offense, our process wasn't great, and we didn't shoot it well.

The defense kept that game very manageable for us, and then once we got some mojo going on offense, the defense stayed at that level, and we were able to break the game open a little bit.

Q. Why do you think things were able to open up the

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way they did for Hartenstein with the lob finishes and the other feeds for dunks?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: That's a physical team that plays with great intensity. They also have great athleticism. There's a reason they are as good as they are defensively. I thought in the first half we were kind of tiptoeing with the ball, and you really can't do that against that team and expect to crack them, and then in the second half we had more force. The force in the pick-and-rolls allows him to get out for some of the lobs, the force getting into the lane makes the threes higher quality, and we shot it better, obviously, got fouled more.

I thought our mentality against their physicality in the second half was much better, and it left a lot to be desired in the first half.

Q. Obviously this is all still very new, but you guys do have an opportunity to play for a trophy on Tuesday night. Personally, how much importance are you putting on the Championship game and what it would mean to have that accomplishment this far in the season?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I said this yesterday, but we have a competitive group of guys. The NBA is competitive. If we line up and practice and play 5-on-5, the guys are killing each other to try to win a scrimmage with nobody watching, and I would imagine it's mostly like that in every NBA gym. So when you put anything on the line, the guys are going to be amped up for that. I think you've seen that from every team throughout the whole Cup, and both teams will bring their fastball on Tuesday.

Q. You talked about the physicality and the toughness that you guys needed to bring before the game. What did you think about the way you guys came into the game, especially considering the offense wasn't going the way you wanted to?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, the defense was there right from the jump. To hold them to 41 or 40 in the first half was a great defensive half, and we really forced them away from their strengths, and we put them in a crowd and were able to generate some tough shots and turnovers. We really made them earn everything.

Then like I said, the offense wasn't where it needed to be to be like a sustainable source for us, but in the second half we got that going and maintained the defense. That was the difference for us.

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