

# Emirates NBA Cup

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## Oklahoma City Thunder

### Mark Daigneault

Championship Practice Day



**Q. Obviously the NBA Cup exists between the regular season and the playoffs. With the extra day in between the semifinal and final, how much more kind of attention to a game plan can you put in compared to a normal regular season game?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: A little more but it's an early game tomorrow. We're not having a formal shoot around. So really, not a ton. And we're still in the mode of improving and kind of building our muscle systematically, and this is not a departure from that. And we think that that also gives us the best chance to win the game.

So one way or the other really not changing our preparation very much because we think our preparation is sufficient as it is.

**Q. Real quick about health. Is everybody able to practice today that you would normally?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yep.

**Q. And then as the coach for the No. 1 team in the West, if this continues, you likely will be involved in All-Star Weekend. We don't exactly know what that's going to look like yet in terms of how the games look but is there anything that you would like to see changed about the All-Star Weekend or how would you do it since they are going to change again anyway?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Among people qualified to weigh in on that, I'm very far down the list, so I'm just going to abstain.

**Q. We haven't seen Milwaukee yet this year but over the last few years, it's felt like coming out of those games, you felt like those matchups were really good for this team in terms of some takeaways against just how hard they played, how physical they played. What do you want to see out of this group based off maybe how you've played against them and how they have played against you in the past?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, this is a great test for us.

The game, we played them late in the year last year on the road and they really took it to us, and it was a great game for us. Because we had been having a great season to that point, and we ran up against a team that was really ready to take it to us, and they did. Physically mauled us. Played with more edge that night.

It was good -- it was like water in the face for us. I thought it really informed us at the level of physicality, focus, everything you need to win against a good team, they exposed, on that particular night.

And again, we are focused. We have 70 percent of the season left. So we are focused on continuing to grow. But testing yourself against a team that's playing as well as they are, that's as capable as they are, will help us one way or the other. If we clear the hurdle, we'll have earned it, and if we don't, we'll learn about ourselves. That's why playing in games like this is very valuable.

**Q. Do you know what winning the NBA Cup would mean to you and your team if it were to happen?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It hasn't happened, so I don't know.

Again I'm more focused on the growth of the team with 70 percent of the season left, and with the age of our team, we are not a finished product and we have a lot we can improve on, and a lot we have to sustain if we want to be a good team.

And this is a great challenge. You know, it's an elevated situation with a lot of distractions and a lot of noise around it against a very good team.

So it's a great test and a great challenge to kind of figure out where we are and how we play in this type of situation, and we're going to learn from it one way or the other. But I don't know otherwise.

**Q. Wanted to ask you about defense, you have a lot of guards that can play on the island and play one-on-one defense on players, and I just wanted to ask you more so, especially with this new era generation focused a lot on offense, what can you say about players using the defensive end to get on the court, especially a guy**

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**like Cason who is really playing and showing that he can play on the floor, and then it helps him showcase his offensive ability, too.**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: The league has never been more skilled, dynamic. The offenses have been never been more efficient. The shooting's never been more capable across the league. I think the numbers would support that.

And that obviously gets a lot of attention but basketball is a game that 50 percent of the game is played on offense and the other half is played on defense, and the attention doesn't always reflect that.

But there's two sides to that coin. So if the league is as skilled as it is, if the shooting is as good as it is, if the players are as good as they are, the ability to guard that becomes paramount. That's the flipside of the coin.

And we've got guys that not only are capable but they are committed to it and they are competitive and they understand the value of it to team success, and it's been a huge strength of our team to this point.

**Q. You talked about there's 70 percent of the season left and both the Lakers and the Pacers last year kind of went off to slow starts after the NBA Cup. So how are you balancing making sure your team is able to win tonight or does its best tonight with knowing that you play in two days against the Heat and the rest of the season is coming up?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, we want to win. This is an opportunity to win and it's an opportunity to compete and we're going to be very present in that. There's no other way to be. And so we are not getting ahead of ourselves with that.

But it will be a challenge coming out of it for both teams. You know, we're coming off of -- we're basically on a six-day West Coast road trip right now, and our next game coming out of this is three time zones away, four-hour flight to Orlando and then a back-to-back against Miami. Which if you look that as a road trip, is an unprecedented road trip. I mean, the NBA would never schedule that. They would never put a team a six-day West Coast road trip, and then fly them east for a back-to-back.

And so you know, this is a great challenge for us. We're excited about it. But it will present challenges on the other side but we'll handle those when we're there.

**Q. Does your familiarity with Dam as a Blazer, being in the division with him, facing him a number of times, benefit you facing him in a Bucks uniform tomorrow?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: To a degree. I mean, there's kind of two parts to every game plan. There's the individual player, and those guys have habits and they have strengths, and you can learn them. And we obviously have got some familiarity with him from his time there.

But then there's those skills inside the ecosystem that they are in now, and they are a different animal with him combined with the other guys on their team. You know, especially with Giannis, and those two guys in a pick-and-roll presents like a completely different challenge.

So a little bit, but also they are different when they change teams and change systems, change teammates, that sort of thing.

**Q. Shai has obviously emerged as one of the league's stars over the last couple years. How do you see him responding to these type of opportunities, these type of games where clearly there's a brighter spotlight?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: He's always the coolest guy in the room. It doesn't matter what room he's in. He's the coolest guy in the room. So I've seen him respond. What's impressive to me about him, aside from what everybody can see on the surface, is the defense, first of all. He continues to play on that end of the floor with great commitment despite being obviously a great offensive player.

And then the ascension of his teammates, which isn't a given with a great player like that. Sometimes their greatness and their gravity can bite into the hole. But his teammates have been able to ascend, despite his ascension.

And so guys like Jalen, guys like Chet, those guys, it has not stopped them from becoming great players in their own right. And guys like Isaiah Joe, Wiggins, role players have maximized themselves. And I think those two things on this stage, I think go a little bit overlooked, just overshadowed by his greatness on offense.

But to answer your question, he's the coolest guy in the room.

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