

Emirates NBA Cup

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

Oklahoma City Thunder

Mark Daigneault

Championship Postgame



Milwaukee Bucks 97, Oklahoma City Thunder 81

Q. Mark, obviously you guys didn't have the shot making tonight on some looks that would normally go down, but what were some of the controllable things that weren't quite there for you tonight?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, first of all, congrats to Milwaukee. Both teams were trying to win that game, and they did that. They outplayed us and they deserved to win, so congratulations to them.

In terms of our stuff, I thought we did some good things. We outscored them in the paint, so obviously we did the job defensively on that end, but obviously a tough night offensively all the way around for us. We didn't score nearly enough points, especially in the second half, to give ourselves a chance to win, but we can learn from it. We'll move forward here.

Q. What do you attribute the tough night offensively to?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's usually a combination of things. It could be a shot-making thing. I thought we got some decent looks. I could have done a better job shaking us free in some situations. But we have 70 percent of the season left, so it's important that we zoom out of this one. We played three relatively high stakes games this week with Dallas, Houston and tonight, which is a valuable experience for us as we have a lot of the season left.

We've got to take some of the lessons from this, good and bad, apply it forward, but obviously we weren't good enough on that end tonight.

Q. Mark, obviously Giannis is one of one, maybe in his own class in terms of what he does on the floor, but what did he show you about your defense tonight, and what was so difficult with him just in the way he plays around the rim?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: He's obviously a great player. I thought we weren't as tight with him with our defensive

game plan as we were in Dallas or at the home game against Dallas or the Houston game or as we have been on many of the top guys we've played against this year. We've been really good about getting those guys to play to their weaknesses.

We had some possessions where we did that with him, but we also had some breakdowns that I thought were uncharacteristic. He's a little different because where he catches it on the floor, the elbow isos and the post-ups, you don't see that every night. We can learn from it and be better the next time we play them, and we'll play them two more times.

Q. Eight points in the paint in the second half. What do you attribute most of that to?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, they're big, and they collapse the paint quite a bit, and you can get shots against them, and if you make them it can loosen them up a little bit, and I thought not being able to get some of those to fall kind of had them doubling down on the paint, and it made it harder and harder for us to get in there.

Like I said, I could have done a better job. I never look at it as, like, we just missed shots. I could have done a better job shaking us free at different times in that game. But we can learn from it. It's a high-level opponent that it was a high-level game, and that's a good experience for our team and for everybody.

Q. How does this Cup experience resemble the Playoffs, or does it at all?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's closer to, like, elevated regular season than it is to the Playoffs in my opinion. The time of year has to do with that, the nature of a series versus a one-and-done situation has to do with that. But playing elevated opponents, good opponents with some elevated stakes, elevated distractions is a good experience in December for our team, and as I've said all along, win or lose, we're trying to grow with a lot of the season left, and being in these situations has helped us do that, so now we've got to take these lessons and head into the rest of the first half of the season.



Q. You never get techs and beyond this week I don't think Lu really ever gets techs, but it felt like that third quarter stretch early in the third quarter changed the game. What did you see in that sequence and what were you so frustrated with?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I made my point. I'm not going to get too far into it. I made my point. I like those guys. They did a good job. We didn't lose because of the refs.

Q. You mentioned yesterday the very specific lessons you learned from the butt-whooping you took in Milwaukee last year. This is fresh, you haven't been able to digest it, but what do you see as the things from this game that can teach you guys moving forward?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, these are like the Lakers. They're like Dallas. There's a size element to them. They're a team that you really have to try to move around. It's hard to do that. They're really good at not doing that. Then there's blunt force on offense, similar to those teams. They pump fastballs against you and you've got to be able to hit 98.

It's not just one game. But these are informative games. You win the Dallas game, we win the Houston game, those games give you confidence because they're elevated opponents. You execute, you go earn the games. Then when you lose a game like tonight, it gives you wisdom. It gives you information on yourselves, and as long as we're growing through all those experiences, then we'll gain momentum as the season goes on. We're still a young team and a team that's growing through everything.

These were good experiences this week, and now we've got to get back into the rhythm of the season and continue to get going here.

Q. You opted to go with Isaiah Joe in the starting lineup. What went into that decision?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: The shooting against their size. They've got Giannis and Lopez in the first unit, so I thought getting some shooting out there early was good. We got off to a great start offensively, 20 points before you could blink.

The other thing I didn't know Middleton wasn't playing until later in the day. I thought Cason and Caruso for Middleton and Lillard, Middleton and Giannis was appropriate. We could have shifted some things around rotationally to accommodate that. I thought it kind of checked both boxes, and everybody is live, as usual. We've kind of settled in lately to Cason, but we'll continue to look at it

tonight and kind of use the starting lineup and the rotation to test our team, look at different things, give different guys opportunities, as we've always done.

Q. What did you see that went wrong in the third quarter offensively?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I'd have to look at it again. Like I said, I could have done a better job. When your team scores 14 points in a quarter, the first place to look is the mirror. I've got to look at ways I can get us shaken free there. Obviously, there's always a shot-making element to everything, but we've got a good enough team that we should be able to generate some offense there, so I'll take that one.

Q. With this specific opponent with the size element, does any part of you wonder what Chet might have meant in this game?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I love Chet. I wish he was available. I wish he wasn't hurt. But I'm very present in the games.

At the end of the day, in these types of situations, you're playing your strengths against their strengths, and their strengths were stronger than ours tonight. But when we lose a game, we've proven that we can beat anybody with our strengths, so we're going to tap back into that. We're not going to daydream about what our vulnerabilities are or what the other team's strengths are. We're just trying to double down on the things we do well, which has been good enough in a lot of situations, so we've just got to learn from it, figure out how to attack it. Like I said, we play these guys two more times, so we'll be able to test ourselves again.

Q. A lot more Shai off the ball tonight. What went into that decision?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Jackson's pressure. They're picking up full and he's denying them full, and rather than having him go get the ball in the backcourt and exert a lot of effort to get the ball and get the ball over half court, we move him off the ball. It's an attack we've seen with Dillon Brooks. It's an attack we've seen with Herb Jones. There's multiple ways to play him. That's one way teams try to play him, and we've got solutions built in. We've got other guys that can create, other guys that can handle, and we try to do that.

Obviously, we weren't able to shake him as much as we'd like to, but that was the reason for it.

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