

Emirates NBA Cup

Friday, December 12, 2025

San Antonio Spurs

Coach Mitch Johnson

Semifinal Practice Day



Q. Mitch, with Vic being probable, would he be on any type of minutes restriction if he does play?

MITCH JOHNSON: Yes. You know, still ongoing conversations on what that looks like, and he's going to be tired. The excitement, the mental fatigue, he was tired the first time I saw him play live against video guys. He is just so excited to be back out on the court. So obviously in a game like this, it would be, regardless, but I can only expect the excitement for him and want to get out there.

So I would suspect an early sub and not his normal minutes.

Q. How much did Vic lobby for this? And knowing that even if you get to Tuesday, in theory, yes, it counts for money and, yes, it's a game to go in, but it doesn't count in the standings. Was there a thought to giving Vic a few more days, knowing that Tuesday won't count in the record?

MITCH JOHNSON: You know, yeah, it's a great question. It's hard because of the circumstances around this game and the previous game we've had. That conversation has been going on for two weeks. Victor's return to play, like all of our guys' return to play, happens the moment, whatever the reason why they don't play, happens. Then you have to go through the process of trying to get them back on the court. If, what, then, this type of stuff happens all the time.

So he has been lobbying since the day it happened.

"I actually feel pretty good. I think I could play tonight."

So the added visibility and conversation around this game, around the game in L.A., around any potential games after this, I totally understand. But in all reality, we would strip all that back when we have those real honest conversations about where are we at, what are we walking out of and then what are we talking into, understanding added visibility, understanding it's a long season and understanding all the things that go with it.

Yes, is kind of the answer to all of it, to be honest. I do

think we want Victor -- we want all of our guys to play through things that they think they can play through and play all the minutes and all the games. That's the competitive spirit we're looking for, and it's our job at times, whether that's medically, organizationally, coaching, as a staff, to be the bad guys or bring some of the sobering truth to whatever the circumstances may be.

Q. A repeat of what I asked you in L.A., this setting, with the media trappings, how beneficial for the guys to go through this and soak up the environment and the competition?

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, obviously the competition, when you don't know who those two games are going to be at the start of the season based on everybody else's games, including your own, and then you get to play in L.A. versus the Lakers and you get to play in Vegas versus the Thunder, high-level, competitive unknowns that were brought to our attention, obviously, when the information came out. And great experience.

All the other stuff, I think, is a good experience. I don't know what that means or what comes from it, but I think we can all go to any part of our lives, personally, professionally, where usually experience helps you gain some wisdom and some references looking back on it, or what you may be going through in the future.

We're kind of just trying to take all this day-by-day and know it's a lot of unknown, for a lot of us, not only individually but most of us as a group. That's not just good or bad; that's what it is. Don't try to make it more than that, but also allow it to be a positive influence where appropriate.

Q. Tony Parker was here earlier talking about how even as different this team is personnel-wise from the Spurs glory years, he still sees a lot of Spurs DNA in what you guys are doing. How much carryover is there for a team that has no experience on this stage or the playoffs or things like that?

MITCH JOHNSON: You're asking about the carryover of the DNA? Yeah, there's a lot of things, when you look in our organization, there's a lot of continuity, a lot of

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connection to those teams and throughout the years. Pop coached the majority of this team, obviously.

There's a lot of foundation, a lot of fiber and identity that we're trying to continue to grow in the light of our organization for a long time that we've had present. We understand there will be some modernizing, some change, whether that comes from how the game is being played or who our best players are, some slightly philosophical things. I'm not Pop, so I can't lead how he did.

But it's good to hear someone that lived it and we look up to as kind of one of our legends to be able to speak highly of us in that light. It's something we're trying to continue to build.

Q. I know you're largely focused on your team for obvious reasons, but the Thunder won everything there is to win except this last year, and they are 24-1, and the numbers almost by every measure are better. Are they better than last year, and what does that say, if they are?

MITCH JOHNSON: It's hard to answer that. Obviously they won the championship. I think you're just seeing the team that won the championship continue to grow. So I guess in that vein, they would be better.

Mark has done a great job. They have obviously built their team from the ground up organizationally. The continuity, consistency, they have built their identity, and they have played their standard. They're sharp every game. You have to beat them. Their record is that for a reason, and their results from the last year. And until someone knocks them off, obviously they are the champs.

Q. Just a clarification, since the first question had some wiggle room there. Do you expect Victor to play tomorrow? Has that been decided, or is that going to be a final decision made in the moments up to tip-off?

MITCH JOHNSON: I expect Victor to play tomorrow.

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