

# Emirates NBA Cup

Saturday, December 13, 2025

**San Antonio Spurs**

**Mitch Johnson**

Semifinal Postgame



San Antonio Spurs 111, Oklahoma City Thunder 109

**Q. In the first half, the two times that Wemby checked into the game you guys closed double-digit deficits to single digits. And I know you've been around him a long time, but do you ever get surprised at just the impact that he has on these games?**

MITCH JOHNSON: Honestly, tonight was one of those, with just all the added emotion, excitement, nerves, good and bad, I wasn't really sure what to expect. I thought we saw ourselves want it almost too much. We were a little tight. I thought we had good competitiveness, I thought our spirit was in the right place I thought our intentions were good. But obviously missed some shots. We just need the game to slow down for us and I think we did a good enough job of just working the game to settle in. I thought Victor did also. He played a 36-minute game. We basically played a 12-minute game and then a 36-minute game, not sure how logical it is, but that's the cards we were dealt and how we played him, and I thought he did a phenomenal job of impacting the game without having to score. He was aggressive, he wanted to play with the basketball in his hand, but I thought he did a good job of impacting the game without having to score, especially in that second quarter that you referred to.

**Q. What exactly was the minutes restriction and is that how you drew it up to have him play the final five and hope that you would be in it and give him a chance to do Victor stuff down the stretch?**

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, we, it was right about that 20-minute mark. So, we talked about it and we agreed upon it and we were committed to it. We felt like our guys could play that 12-minute game and we would be ready to go after that. I think even though we were down 11, we missed a ton of shots we felt good about and we again, we just had to settle in and I thought we did a great job of that. Then obviously for him to be part of the last three quarters is big time.

**Q. What does a win like this do for you guys, especially since that was the second loss that the**

**Thunder have had this year and that's the defending NBA champions?**

MITCH JOHNSON: All these games are moments and opportunities for us to continue to grow. Obviously, that's the defending champs, and they are who they are for a reason, they earned the reputation they have. So to be able to compete against teams like that, like at Los Angeles where we just came out of before this, it's just opportunities for us to grow. That's our first game as a full team. So we don't know what we don't know and we got to get some on the job training. We've been doing that sporadically with different groups and different lineups and roster availability, and it's good to be able to have the full group out there. I'm sure time will hopefully help that in terms of continuity and execution and learning how to play with one another and complement each other.

**Q. This franchise hasn't been in the playoffs in a few years. While this is not playoffs, does making this mean something to the franchise? You guys even get excited, celebrate it after the game. What does this mean to be back on this kind of level for the Spurs?**

MITCH JOHNSON: I think our franchise is used to and committed to winning, and that's not a knock to any other franchises, but some people that have been with our franchise for a very long time have set a foundation and embedded principles that has allowed that to happen over time. I think when we have not been winning as recently, a lot of those principles and ways we operate have not changed or wavered. We just needed to continue to grow with this group. I think all these opportunities are learning opportunities to get better and to grow and then obviously when you're able to win there is something there that speaks to the confidence. I don't even know if you can quantify that, but I think there is something when you see the result and the feedback of the work that you're putting into it can be motivating and I think what we're seeing is a young team that's hungry and that's gain some confidence. Again, we're 25 games in, so I don't want to overshoot this, but we haven't been able to win as many games as we want to and so that's something that we don't shy away from that and we have to do the work to continue to do that, but we don't shy away from that we lost too many games either.

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**Q. I think in the 12 games that Wemby missed you guys you guys went 9-3. Tonight did you see parts of the game where he was on the bench where you were able to get contributions from De'Aaron, Stephon and Devin, and how important has that been during your stretch, and how important is that going to be in the games ahead?**

MITCH JOHNSON: It's extremely important. Again, I think we are very comfortable in recognizing Victor as the face of our franchise and the biggest piece of our puzzle. But he's not the puzzle by himself, and he doesn't want to be, and we are a team and we're a group. It starts with him because he allows us to coach him and hold him accountable and push him like everybody else and everything else falls in line around him. And the other guys get a ton of credit. Devin Vassell has an impact on winning whether he's making shots or not. De'Aaron Fox has joined an organization, with some start and stop, whether that's his availability and the team around him, and has really influenced our young guys on how to step up in moments. You spoke of the young guys, Luke Kornet and I can go down the line, it's good to see and it's something we have to continue to cultivate and grow.

**Q. There was a missed free throw, it doesn't even count as a rebound because it was first of two, and Vic grabbed the ball and squeezed it and screamed. It was the sort of moment that indicates that this was not just one of 82. Is it fair to say that this one meant maybe a little bit more just because of the situation and the opponent and the site and all that than just another regular season game on December 12 would have?**

MITCH JOHNSON: You know, it is one of 82, but to your point, there are always circumstances and contexts. And that doesn't mean that everybody quantifies them the same, but I do think that our guys have been excited about the Cup, I think our guys are excited to play really good teams. Because they have earned that reputation. So when you play the Oklahoma City Thunder you're getting the league's best. And we are a competitive group and we want to continue to challenge ourselves to continue to get better, and there's no better way to do that but than to play the best.

**Q. Your predecessor and mentor pretty famously did not believe in fouling up three, and I think you did that three times. Are you pretty happy with how that worked out?**

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think we just felt like with the circumstances of the game it was something we wanted to do in terms of the timeouts were starting to go and we felt

comfortable with our defensive rebounding and whatnot. So there's a lot of opinions there, but, yeah, that's something I thought we executed well tonight, especially the first time of us really doing it to that extent.

**Q. What did you feel like was the most impressive aspect of Victor's performance tonight?**

MITCH JOHNSON: I thought the most impressive aspect of Victor's performance was the same as the whole team. I thought we played in, again, a new environment for us, with the added visibility and excitement, rightfully so. And you could tell that that team has done that plenty of times, and we looked like we may have not. We worked the game, we settled in and I thought we were very poised and composed and we allowed it to become just a basketball game. I think when that happened we got to the best version of ourselves.

**Q. Can you talk about Vic's move coming into this game because it looks like he had so much fun out there and even like taunting players and stuff like this, can you talk about that him coming back and being like this tonight?**

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, in a way it was the worst case scenario for his first game back with the restrictions, and there's just so much that he could not control or have a say-so. So it was going to be a little bit of a wild card, and I think for him, he just put himself into the game. I thought that was great. I thought he played unapologetically. I thought he played relentless. I thought he played too fast at times and it was all for the right reasons and the right intentions. I wouldn't change any of it. Every possession that he continues to experience and grow through and grow from is going to be best for him and best for us.

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