

Emirates NBA Cup

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San Antonio Spurs

Mitch Johnson

Championship Postgame



New York Knicks 124, San Antonio Spurs 113

Q. Even if it didn't end like you wanted it to, what do you think the guys got out of this whole experience?

MITCH JOHNSON: Probably that word, more than anything, experience. Second game all together. Playing really competitive games against really, really good teams. Seasoned, experienced teams that have been in similar situations -- I'm not sure about all the Cup experience of all teams. But to be able to feel those games, work those games, be in the moment in those games, I think is a valuable experience.

Q. How do you explain that Vic seems to struggle a bit more between this game and the one on Saturday tonight?

MITCH JOHNSON: I think we struggled more as a team, so that probably played a part in that. We gave up a lot of offensive rebounds, which hurt us getting out in transition.

There were a couple times offensively, we got a little bit in a rush or in a hurry. I thought when we played with the appropriate space but the right spacing and the right tempo we got some really good looks. And we missed them. I think it was probably more of a team thing than I thought Victor was individually struggling.

Q. How valuable could this be? There's obviously going to be a whole lot of teachable stuff from the last 14, 15 minutes you'll see on tape. Not that the guys need to be taught how to play obviously but how valuable can this be for next time, whenever next time comes?

MITCH JOHNSON: I think, again, the start of fourth quarter, and understanding how valuable each possession is and how much that eight-point run can be hard to then combat and equal out. You give them credit; they made plays. But it felt like we participated in some of the opportunities they got there in terms of whether it was backing up, guarding somebody and letting them get a rhythm three, offensive rebounds.

Just some really good experiences. Again, you've got to execute and you've got to make sure that when there is a moment where the game feels like it's getting away from you, that's when you sometimes need to make a stand. Sometimes that's a fundamental play that has nothing to do with directly involving the basketball.

Q. Another opportunity, rare opportunity, that the Cup presents is you almost never see a rookie two months into his career play on a stage like this. How did you feel Dylan performed, especially tonight?

MITCH JOHNSON: I thought he was great. I thought it was a really good response from OKC. I think his box score stat line probably was a little misleading in terms of I think he missed some shots and finishes he typically makes. Had a couple loud mistakes, which at times even I am a victim of overreacting to.

But again, if you zoom all way in or zoom all the way out from our team to our individuals, and as you said, that kid who has played 15-some-odd games in his career to be able to play these last two games is invaluable experience.

Q. The play where you had a three taken off board, how do you think the guys handled the disappointment, the anger, the frustration of that moment, and then trying to keep trying to play through it?

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think there was a few times tonight that we allowed the result of the play or the possession or something that just happened to linger a little too long.

NBA games are long. The ball is going to bounce your way. I thought a couple times tonight, I felt like we were going to get maybe an extended lead, and we missed some shots. Felt like we were going to get an extended lead, and they made some big shots. You just kind of got to continue to find ways to walk through games and operate at that unwavering, unflinching disposition to not allow things, especially that you can't control, affect the next thing, especially, or next things, plural, because that's how you can participate in the runs getting bigger or more

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extended against you.

Q. I know you'll never make an excuse, obviously, but you basically just had a rodeo trip. You've been on the road for three and a half weeks, whatever it is, sans two days. How much better do you think the group got? Now you're whole or close to whole, but how much better do you think the group got being away from home for this long and being through all the experiences you guys have for the last 12 games or whatever it is?

MITCH JOHNSON: I think it's been great. I also think it's probably even more intimate because at the start of this trip, we didn't have everybody, because the injured guys were at home because we made a decision that we felt was best for their rehab.

So I actually think we haven't been on the road all together during that whole time. But I think it did make the last stretch when we were together more intimate, and I think you could feel the guys coming together on and off the court.

Q. I'm just curious, right now as a coach, what do you tell the guys in the locker room, like, just that you are proud of them, basically, mostly? Or that there is room to improve and how are they feeling right now?

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, I think -- I don't want to speak for them but I'm assuming and I'm feeling pretty frustrated because we lost the game. I'm also feeling after 25 games in, I believe, that we've shown some signs that we can be a pretty good team. We've also shown that we have a lot of areas of improvement. I think that's where we were living today and hopefully tomorrow we can continue to get a little bit better and minimize some of the things that we need to improve on.

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