

# NBA Western Conference First Round: Nuggets vs Warriors

Monday, April 18, 2022

San Francisco, California, USA

## Denver Nuggets

## Coach Michael Malone

### Game 2: Postgame

Warriors 126, Nuggets 106

MICHAEL MALONE: We've got to stick together. Most importantly we've got to stick together. We can't splinter in adverse times. That's our challenge when things get tough, finding a way to stay the course.

Obviously you're down six at halftime, and then the third quarter there's just an avalanche. They started off 12-4, we gave up 44 points in the quarter, they shot 66 from the field, they made seven threes. They got to the foul line 12 times, all in the third quarter. We fouled three jump shooters in the third quarter. We had four turnovers for five points in the third quarter.

The thing that jumps out to me after two games is our inability to sustain playing at a high level against this team. They do, they just stay the course. They can match you, they can match you, they can match you, and we have not been able to withstand that.

I just want to make sure as we get on this plane tonight to go home that we get on that plane together, knowing that we have a chance to get our first win at home in a few days. That's our whole focus.

**Q. Amid that 44-point third quarter, cameras showed DeMarcus and Will going at it a little bit and jawing at each other. Is that just frustration boiling over?**

MICHAEL MALONE: Yeah, that's all it is. Without getting into any details, no one wants to get embarrassed, no one wants to get their ass kicked on national TV. That's two games in a row where you're in the game, then snap of the finger you're out of the game, and it just seems like it happens that quickly. So I think it's just frustration.

DeMarcus, Will, our whole team, we have a close team, so we've just got to iron things out, like I said, just find a way



to stay together no matter what's going on, good or bad, find a way to stay the course, stay together, because that's the only chance we have to be competitive in this series. If we're fragmented, if we're breaking off into groups or individuals, then we have zero chance of winning a game in this series.

**Q. You mentioned the third quarter, but to end the half I think it was a 26-7 run and it seems like when we have runs they have really big runs where you have periods where you don't score or score very little. How do you limit their runs a little bit better and stop them in snowballing in those moments?**

MICHAEL MALONE: Yeah, well, great point, obviously. It was 26-8 I believe to close that half, and I told our guys at halftime, in light of that we were down six points, it was a two-possession game. Really lucky, after that kind of a run. But then we coupled the 26-8 with a 12-2 I think to start, so it's a 38-10 run. You're not going to beat anybody.

How do we kind of -- there's been two games in a row where there have been big, big runs for them, so what is the DNA of a run? The DNA for us is turnovers/poor shot selection, that fuels another team's break, they going in transition. They had 20 plus transition points tonight, and then defensively breakdowns, fouling jump shooters. Again, to three three-point jump shooters in one quarter is just undisciplined is the best word I can use, and then breakdowns within the game plan.

I almost feel that we have to play as close to perfect as possible to avoid those runs and to give ourselves a chance, and obviously as we've seen in Game 1 and 2, that is hard to do for 48 minutes.

We looked really good in the first half in stretches. In Game 1 we looked really good in stretches, and we're just not able to sustain it right now. Going home united and finding way to sustain our effort and our play is our biggest challenge in front of us.

**Q. The DeMarcus/Will thing, the technical fouls tonight, is that just disappointing to see because you do have such a veteran team who's been in the**



## Playoffs, who's been in these situations?

MICHAEL MALONE: Yeah, I mean, I told Nikola, I said, as frustrated as you are with the referees, and I feel his frustration, I really do, I think he's getting fouled like he thinks he's getting fouled, he's not getting the call, but he has to find a way to play through that. He's way too valuable, way too important for our team to be in the locker room watching the end of the game. Also as a leader of this team he's got to show guys in adverse times when things aren't going your way, you've got to find a way to fight through it, be mentally tough. That's going to be a challenge for him moving forward.

Same thing with Will/DeMarcus. For me, I know it's coming from a good place, and sometimes how you handle those situations, but we just have to find a way to be just more mentally tough and more poised. When things went awry tonight, we lost our composure, we lost our poise.

**Q. They've had a lot of success with their small ball lineup obviously and I'm sure a lot of that starts defensively for you. When they're in that lineup, do you feel like you guys are doing a good enough job of getting the ball inside to maybe stymie that a little bit?**

MICHAEL MALONE: Yeah, I mean, Nikola was 9 for 20 tonight, and when they go small, it's Draymond on him, and I don't know, Nikola went to the foul line eight times. I'm not sure how many were in the first half compared to the second half, but Draymond is a guy that's won Defensive Player of the Year before. He's guarding him very well. So we're trying to move him around, getting him in different spots where he can try to score against that one-on-one coverage, and then when we go to DeMarcus off the bench, trying to get him in the post, as well, against some smaller guys.

Yeah, I think it is definitely a point of emphasis, but I'm sure we can do a better job of it, as well.

**Q. That lineup, following that question, that Warriors lineup when they have Poole, Thompson and Curry together at the same time has sparked these two runs Game 1 and Game 2. What unique challenges does that present? It seemed like today it wasn't mostly three-point shooting, it was creating driving lanes and space for them.**

MICHAEL MALONE: Well, the challenge is you have three guys that are capable of putting up 30, 40 points. Jordan Poole had 30 points in Game 1, he had 29 tonight. Steph Curry is the greatest Sixth Man ever in the Playoffs. They bring a guy off the bench like that, 34 points, five threes, and then Klay Thompson.

So you have three players that can get it on their own and they do such a great job of passing, cutting, moving and making plays for each other. I learned back in the day, CYO basketball, St. Agnes. The most dangerous guy on the floor is the guy who just passed the ball, and Steph Curry is the embodiment of that, and he's been doing it for years. He gives the ball up, you relax and he's flying off another screen, and he makes you pay. And Jordan Poole, his understudy, has paid attention, done his homework and is playing the same way. Those three on the floor with a Wiggins and a Draymond Green is very, very effective.

**Q. Michael, you talked about sensing Nikola's frustration; knowing Jokic the way you do, what do you expect from him Game 3? And also you talked about this team not splintering; does Jokic have to be the leader that kind of keeps everybody together?**

MICHAEL MALONE: I think in terms of staying together, that's on everybody in that locker room. I mean, being together is not a one person. That's a responsibility that every one of us have. I think that's a team-wide effort, and knowing Nikola the way I do, I'm hoping that when we go home, knowing the way our team the way I do, that we go home and we find a way to fight for 48 minutes and not 24. We put up a good fight in the first half two games in a row.

Unfortunately this is a 48-minute game. Against that team, you've got to play 48 minutes, and we have not done that yet, and that's my greatest challenge as we approach Game 3 is to somehow, some way find a group that's willing to fight and compete for 48 minutes.

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