

NBA Western Conference First Round: Rockets vs Warriors

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San Francisco, California, USA

Houston Rockets

Ime Udoka

Game 6 - Pregame Media Conference

Q. Obviously big news today with Gregg Popovich. What impact did he have on you as a player, coach, person in general?

IME UDOKA: A little bit of everything. It would be up here all night if I told all the stories and all the impact.

Obviously as a professional, played two and a half years for him, coached seven. So spent 10 years of my life. That's probably the least important. It's the person aspect, the daily messages, the lessons that we all learn and think back on.

It's a bittersweet day obviously for all of us, but happy he's in a good place, happy he's good with his family. So yeah, just a special day. Special person. Obviously one of the best to do it, or the best to do it. Glad I got a chance to learn from him, work with him, call him a friend.

Q. What was your reaction when he told you?

IME UDOKA: I knew a while ago it was coming.

Just happy for him, bottom line. Communicated a few weeks ago. Knew this day was coming. Wanted to keep it private.

He gave me a call today, as well, shared some words of wisdom going forward.

Q. Did your understanding of how to be a coach change because of anything that you observed Pop do?

IME UDOKA: I wouldn't say 'understanding'. I think to me it always made sense the way he was and how he thought the game, went about everything. There was never I don't understand why he's doing that. It seemed pretty simple.

I think very similarly to him, as far as a lot of things, he does it his way. The first thing he would tell you is you have to be yourself, not copy somebody, be who they are.

We all go about it different ways. But, like, the foundation of coaching, day-to-day lessons like I mentioned, those stick with you. He keeps it very simple. He says there's no magic formula to this. It's about caring for people. That's the basis of everything he does.

Q. It's one thing to speak out about what's wrong with your people, but Popovich did it for people that didn't look like him, did it for a lot of African Americans, people that were less privileged. What do you think it is about him that made him care and also consider it important to use his platform to speak out for people who didn't look like him?

IME UDOKA: Yeah, I would go back to saying he is who he is. It's the core of who he is as a person. But once you get to know him, know about his upbringing and background. I think being raised in Gary, Indiana, in a multi-cultural neighborhood. He always talked about the neighbors he had, Italian family, Jewish family, black family, everything around him. Immigrants, as well. That's a big part of it, the melting pot he grew up in, the area, the people he was around and raised with. That's the core, like I said.

Yeah, it's the right thing to do, bottom line, regardless if you're black, white, whatever.

Q. In your experience in the Playoffs, you're used to being around older, experienced teams. Being around this young group, have you learned anything about yourself that you might not have known coming into this Playoff series?

IME UDOKA: I mean, yeah, it's just a little bit different with the preparation that you have to get guys ready for. The veteran teams have been there, done that. We do lean on our veterans, as well.

My message coming in was what we've done has worked all year, so let's keep it simple, not reinvent the wheel.



There's going to be some ups and downs, things you have to get used to, physicality and the intensity of every play. At the end of the day it's basketball. I think our young guys approach it like that.

For me anyway, just the details. We talk about consistency coming into the series. That's going to be a big part of it. The quicker we can get accustomed to that, the more success we'd have.

It felt like we kind of got hit in the mouth a few times early in the series, weren't as prepared as we needed to be for certain things. We got a chance to do a deep dive review. We've been much better since.

I would just say attention to detail that it takes to win a Playoff game. Knowing your opponent, they know you just as well. Takes our guys a little bit of time with that. Seems like they got it down and we can continue to build from there.

Q. You said you have to beat the Warriors physically and mentally. What do you want to see as far as mental toughness?

IME UDOKA: What it takes to avoid those lulls like we had last game here. The 13-2, start. 18-1, third quarter. That's a big part of their team, that thrives off of runs and big shots, turnovers, and those things.

The mental toughness to do the right thing on every play, the simple thing every day, and be consistent is a theme of this Playoffs for us.

Understanding the crowd is going to be into it. They're going try to be more physical and all those things that happen. You just have to take that initial hit or deliver it yourself and not be as reactive as we have been at times.

Q. I think after Game 5 you talked about your team's ability to recognize the plays that are coming. Is that something you had to experience in the game to understand what the Warriors have coming in the future or is it a natural thing of Playoff basketball?

IME UDOKA: No, I mean, you see it. At some points the lineup changes, adjustments. But who you are is who you are.

I think we've guarded their sets much better. Had that week of preparation. You hope to get it down. That's some of the things with a younger group as opposed to a veteran team that understands the league, understands certain things, sees things coming, have a good awareness of that.

I think we weren't our best early in the first few games, but we've gotten much better after that. Six games into it now, you should start to know certain trends and things like that. I think we have done that.

Now it's about the personnel, limiting certain guys' tendencies. I think that's the next step for us, to take away certain actions. We guarded the plays well, now it's time to guard the personnel a little bit better.

Thank you.

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