

NBA Western Conference Semifinals: Timberwolves vs Warriors

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Golden State Warriors

Steve Kerr

Game 3 - Pregame Media Conference



Q. You've been through literally every scenario in basketball, curious if you can draw upon, is there any scenario where you were tied 1-1 and the star player was injured? Kind of this particular scenario either as a player or coach that you can draw on?

STEVE KERR: I think you draw on everything. Every year is different but there's always injuries. There's always circumstance, suspensions. The other team is missing guys. You're right, we have seen everything here in the last decade, and so you draw on that and you just think about the current circumstances and your current roster and you figure out a plan and that's what we're doing today.

Q. Seemed like Game 2, the most productive group was the one that started the second half with Kuminga on the floor. What do you like about that lineup?

STEVE KERR: Transition was good. JK got out ahead of the play a couple times and that was good. I thought we made a good push at both ends and we made a good run and kind of lost our focus after that run. I think we cut it to 7 and turned it over a couple times and missed a switch. They got open for a three.

But that was a good run, and we obviously looked at that and then we looked at the first game when Steph went down and some of the combinations that we had out there that were successful in that game as well.

So those things all inform us, what we can do tonight.

Q. You mentioned that the formulas changed, clearly, and when we asked Jimmy what the formula can be, and he said it's attack. Can it be as simple as some guys just have to go put their head down and try to make something happen?

STEVE KERR: You're talking about Jimmy himself?

Q. He was talking about himself and others, everybody. Can you do that, just say, Hey, guys, see what you can do?

STEVE KERR: The key is you have to gain an advantage. If you don't gain an advantage, they are really athletic and long and you're trying to beat them one-on-one without a whole lot of spacing and that's tricky.

So how do you gain an advantage; that's our challenge. You can do that in transition and playing with great pace, which is part of what we were able to do during the good stretches of Game 2. You can do it with pick-and-roll with certain combinations, certain actions, trying to create defensive mistake, and those are all things that we have to do more consistently tonight. Once you gain the advantage, then you can attack when you have some openings.

Q. What you have done with Steph is movement centric. How closely can you mimic it without him when he is the ultimate driver? Do you have to change your philosophy offensively?

STEVE KERR: You can't suddenly install a new offense in one day, I know that. But we obviously will lean into Jimmy, play through him. We're still going to run similar actions.

But Steph is 1 of 1. A lot of the stuff that he creates is not replicable because we don't call a ton of plays. We run pick-and-roll with Steph, he comes off, gives it up and starts flying around. There's no call for that. It's a concept more than anything.

And so it's not really about play calls. It's about playing with pace and energy, playing through Jimmy. Having the correct spacing, and then getting stops. We have to win this game with our defense. Wolves have a great defense. We've been No. 1 in defense in the league since the Jimmy trade. I felt like we won the Houston series with our defense. So this game really starts on the defensive side for us.



Q. We know the numbers didn't play out great with Jimmy and JK on the floor during the regular season. Can you build confidence after the last game?

STEVE KERR: I thought they played well together. I've said this a dozen times but without Steph, we have to completely rethink things. We found a great formula when JK was injured, and Jimmy arrived, and we started winning. We put ourselves in this position. But now without Steph, I don't care about any of that stuff.

So we will absolutely have those guys out there together and we've spent a lot of time the last couple of days, really thinking about the five-man combinations for the full 48 minutes. You know, you map stuff out. But sometimes you have to change on the fly. You can't really -- I don't know that we've ever followed exactly our location strategy. But we do have some ideas, and those guys will play together.

Q. You reiterated the need for the defense to lead the way. What from Game 1 to Game 2 didn't you do as well that you need to get back to in this game to set that tone?

STEVE KERR: Loose balls. Rebounds. There are a couple plays in the first half where we had the loose ball if we wanted and we sort of lazily put one hand; we have to go get every loose ball. We're not going to get them all, but we have to go for them. Games like this, that sets a tone. We have to set a stone with our energy and our force more than anything.

Q. Draymond not only got the tech but there was obviously an ugly incident with the fans with the fans in the arena and he seemed emotional after the game. Do you need to talk to him before this game, talk to him about turning page? You have a lot of experience with Draymond. Will he just handle that on his own?

STEVE KERR: We talked about it yesterday, and he's in good spirits. The fact that the Timberwolves handled it so well, security, I think all was really meaningful.

We talked about it yesterday, and he's ready to go tonight.

Q. Is there a shelf life on zone defense during the course of a game? Can it be effective for more than ten or 15 possessions, do you think?

STEVE KERR: Rarely. Rarely. I think it's a changeup rather than a fastball. Although, you know, watching Cleveland yesterday, they must have run 20 possessions of zone and had a lot of success. There are exceptions

and there are games where -- I would say the Houston Game 7 we probably played 20 possessions of zone or so, so there are exceptions.

But generally, it's more change the rhythm. Change the pace a little bit. It's probably not more than ten possessions. But if it's working, you stay with it.

Q. Does Trayce have a maturity, makeup? His role diminished but he seems to have stayed ready. You have a lot of guys like that on a team with depth, but what has he shown you in terms of being ready-ready when called upon?

STEVE KERR: He's very, very mature, very practical. You know, when you talk to him about his role, he's always very understanding, and in the two years that he's been here, he's just shown himself to be incredibly mature and stays ready. He's done a really good job of that. Obviously he fell out of the rotation in January probably.

But every day, he's staying ready and playing in the low-minutes games that we have with our younger players and two-way players. Trayce is a pro.

Q. I know you've said all along that depth is such a benefit but also sometimes hard for the coach. But in a time like this, aren't you thrilled with all the different guys who have been unselfish and able to step in at different times?

STEVE KERR: Yeah, you have to have that, and we've had a lot of guys who have done a great job of staying ready. Buddy is a great example. He was out of the lineup in terms of a starter, being a starter, and obviously put him in the starting lineup, and the way he stayed prepared, and the games he had, Game 7, Houston, Game 1 of this series. Buddy has been great. We're lucky to have the professional players we do.

Q. Is it an added wrinkle trying to find offense without Steph; that any isolation you play is right in the teeth of what they do best defensively?

STEVE KERR: Right, that's the balance. That's the trick. It's not like we're throwing five three-point shooters on the floor. You know, spacing the floor and we are going to have a lot of lineups out there that don't feature a lot of spacing. We have to execute. We have to make sure we get space to make sure we're setting screens. Make sure we're playing with pace, and those are all things that if you don't do, the Wolves are good about lining you up and staying in front of you with all those long athletic guys, and they make it really tough.

Q. Following up about Jonathan and Jimmy and looking at it in a fresh way, why do you think they struggled during the regular season and why do you think they played so much better together the other night?

STEVE KERR: No. 1, they play the same position. Jonathan is a really high-usage player. Like 92nd percentile in the NBA. Jimmy is a really high-usage player.

Steph actually isn't because he gives up the ball and flies off of it so much. You know it, was really about the formula that we found after we got Jimmy with JK out.

At the end of the season, when JK came back, I think for the last ten, 12 games, I think we played him about 18 minutes a game, and we really tried to fit him in as a role player playing with and behind those guys, and frankly it wasn't great. JK is a guy who really needs the ball but Jimmy-Jimmy. We're going to give Jimmy the ball. And so when we did play them together, it wasn't great. But like I said, without Steph, things change, and we'll see what it looks like.

Q. I know Steph's official reevaluation is coming a week from the injury, but do you expect him to stay completely off of him until the week is done or is he starting to do gradual things?

STEVE KERR: That's a really nice question. Good way of trying to sneak in an update before the actual update (laughter). I respect that you asked that.

But no, we'll have an update after a week. Right, Raymond?

RAYMOND RIDDER: Good job.

STEVE KERR: Every once in a while I listen to Raymond. (Laughter).

Q. Are you willing to share your lineup today?

STEVE KERR: No.

Q. And the other question is: Without Steph, what are the challenges to get the spacing you like? Even with Buddy out there, what are the challenges?

STEVE KERR: Well, the challenge is we have to put two-way lineups on the floor. We have to get stops. Like I said, we've got to win this game and this series with our defense.

So the challenge is you put your best defense and lineups

on the floor and you may not have a ton of spacing. So then you know how do you counter that? You counter it with pace and energy and offensive rebounds and second-chance opportunities. Force turnovers. Get out in transition. If you are in the halfcourt, you have to execute.

So even if you don't have traditional shooting spacing, you still have to be spaced. And we've had some possessions where we got a few guys whose tendency is to crowd the paint; if you have three different guys crowd the paint, it's 1984 but we don't have Kareem to throw the ball into for a sky hook, either. That's where it gets a little tricky and where the natural tendencies of players who are going to gravitate towards the paint, they have to stay space, and we can run some actions to counter what the defense is doing if we do that.

Q. One of most underappreciated things about Steph is keeping everyone grounded and his levity. How are you missing his personality -- he's still there but has anyone stepped up keeping the team happy and enjoying the game?

STEVE KERR: Steph is still here. Nothing changes with the vibe. The last few days with Steph being injured, the vibe is the exact same. The guys are prepping and together and laughing and they play basketball for a living. Life is good.

You know, the vibe's good.

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