

NBA Finals: Heat vs. Nuggets

Saturday, June 3, 2023

Denver Nuggets

Nikola Jokic

Practice Day



Q. Tell me about the motivation of this possibility to give the city the first NBA title, and what would that mean? Especially for the kids from Denver that want to be like you, what kind of message could you send?

NIKOLA JOKIC: Yes, of course, it's motivation. It's huge because it's never done before. We are going to leave some legacy if we do it. But I don't know, are kids supposed to look up to me or whatever, I think they need to have their own path.

Q. You just mentioned legacy. You're building a tremendous legacy here and at home. What would you like to achieve in the next five, eight years? What other things would you like to achieve in terms of building a legacy?

NIKOLA JOKIC: To be honest, I don't think about that much. I'm just playing. I'm just playing, and my focus has never been those kinds of records or whatever, whatever the media are putting on me. I'm just trying to win a game and just play every game. Go step-by-step and play every game to win a game, as simple as that.

Q. You've been working with Felipe Eichenberger for a long time and you had the ultimate goal, of course, to win the championship, but you are not there yet. But can you describe what this moment means for both of you?

NIKOLA JOKIC: Yes, he is always the guy who has optimism and energy is so high. I'm completely opposite of him. Just to have him since I came here and we are growing together, and now we have an opportunity to do something nice, I think it's good for both of us.

Q. Malone just said, "I don't think we played well in Game 1." I don't want to assume that you agree with him, but if you do, what needs to be cleaned up going into tomorrow night?

NIKOLA JOKIC: Some possessions we play amazing and

some possessions we didn't play good. Some quarters we played really good. I think that's basketball. That's why it's a live thing. You cannot predict what's going to happen.

Yes, of course, we are going to be better, but we are going to take 1-0 for us. Just being focused for 48 minutes, I think that's going to be the key. Just the way how they play, they don't let their guard down and they are always playing the same way with the same pace. I think that's why they are great.

Q. Nikola, how would you assess your defense throughout this entire postseason run, and how unique of a challenge are the Miami Heat for you on that end?

NIKOLA JOKIC: I think I need to get a trophy, my friend, I don't know what it is. I'm joking, I'm joking (laughter).

It's not just me. I think when you see the last game, us against Miami, in the first three quarters, they score 65, 68 points. I think that's really amazing. And then you can see the fourth quarter, they scored 30-something.

When we are collectively really good, then I'm really good, too. But when we are collectively not good, I'm not really good. I think it goes how good the team is, that's how I'm good in defense. I'm going to say it like that.

Q. I was in Belgrade in 2016 for that Olympic qualifier. I think you were the MVP for that team. There was a thrill to that team and being on that team, and there was a responsibility there, too. You have the same thing here at the NBA. How does the thrill and the responsibility compare between your work with Serbia and your working with Nuggets?

NIKOLA JOKIC: It's different. It's different when you play for Serbia. It's always a little bit more of emotions, adrenaline. The whole country is cheering for you, and that's the dream for every player that ever played probably from Serbia, to play for the national team.

It's a little bit more of, I don't say -- let's say pressure, but it's not pressure. Just emotions. It's a little bit of everything, let's say, for one little next level of everything.



Q. Your coach was just talking about Bam and the respect you guys have for him. The Heat have fed off his energy this season and they tend to play better when he's aggressive early. What's the trade-off there? Because you don't want Jimmy or the shooters beating you, but how do you feel you guarded Bam in Game 1?

NIKOLA JOKIC: The shots that he make, it was pretty easy shots for him. I need to do a little bit better job just to make him uncomfortable. I think he can go to the shots that he wants, if that make any sense, but I just need to be there just to -- him to do another step or another dribble or another move. Just don't give him the easy ones, let's say like that.

Q. What has it been like for you in the past when you sit out and you see your team kind of have to scramble, and what's it been like now in the playoffs? Michael was saying that he feels the other guys have done a better job when you're not in the game.

NIKOLA JOKIC: Yes, I mean, I think in the past somebody is always injured. We never had a constant group of guys coming off the bench, if that makes any sense.

Now when we kind of know the rotation, I think the guys are doing a really good job of playing and being aggressive and attacking when they see the seams.

Q. (Question from Walker Kessler.) Just want to ask, I know you get a lot of questions about basketball and everything, man, but just want to know, how you doing? How you feeling?

NIKOLA JOKIC: Oh, I like it. Doing good. It's raining today. It was rainy when I came here.

Q. Listen, my day got brighter when I saw you.

NIKOLA JOKIC: Oh, I like it, my friend. Appreciate it. Appreciate it.

I think we are just waiting for the game to come. I think when the game comes, everything is going to be normal. Right now, everything is a little bit too much.

Q. Thank you, big fan.

NIKOLA JOKIC: Thank you, my friend.

Q. How important has DeAndre Jordan's voice in the locker room been for this team?

NIKOLA JOKIC: It's not just him. I think he played with a lot of good players. He was on some good teams, and he saw a little bit of everything. But Ish, Jeff and him are kind of all old hats, let's say like that. When they talk, I think everybody listens because if you listen to them, you can hear some really smart things that can help you play the game. I really appreciate and am really thankful for them.

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