

NBA Finals: Heat vs. Nuggets

Sunday, June 4, 2023

Miami Heat

Coach Erik Spoelstra

Game 2: Postgame



Miami Heat 111, Denver Nuggets 108

Q. Can you take us into the fourth quarter? I know being in that spot is a place where you guys have got edge, obviously, very comfortable this year, but the mindset knowing the stakes of the next 12 minutes, what was said in that huddle?

ERIK SPOELSTRA: I don't totally remember. I think we were talking about some schematics. It was more about that. This is complex. Basically every other huddle we're talking about what it's going to require and all those extra efforts and physical plays without fouling, just making winning plays.

But I think at that time, we were talking about some schematics. That's a really good offensive team. They force you to have to compete at a super-high level, but you have to do it with a brain and you have to do it with discipline.

And our guys, regardless of how the head coach feels, during the fourth quarter, our guys love to compete. They love to put themselves out there in those moments of truth. Fortunately we were able to make a lot of big defensive plays down the stretch, and then we got a lot of contributions, which you're going to need against a team like this.

Some of that run happened with J.B. on the bench. Their run in the second quarter happened with Jokic on the bench. Duncan's minutes were really good. Kyle just has this veteran championship experience that just kind of settles everybody, and he just makes the big, appropriate plays, our big plays at the appropriate times.

And then Bam, we just can't say enough of how difficult his responsibilities are in this series. To take arguably the toughest cover in the league for all the myriad of reasons that I don't need to get into, and then he has to shoulder a big offensive role for us, as well. So it's not like he can just stand and rest on the offensive side, and yes, he has to

play 40-plus minutes, as well.

Q. You guys all had a bunch of really, really impressive shot-making games this postseason, but tonight what did you feel you did better as far as the offensive process, especially in that fourth quarter?

ERIK SPOELSTRA: More intentional. And that doesn't guarantee you anything either, but at least you give yourself the best chance. That the ball is going where it needs to go and everybody understands what we are trying to get accomplished. Then you have to trust. You have to trust each other.

So we did get some relief points on cuts and extra passes, ball movement that led to open shots. Yes, it always looks better if the ball goes in. But our guys are competitors. They love those kinds of moments.

Q. I know mental toughness has been a bedrock of the organization for a few decades, but why do you think this team has shown to be so resilient over and over?

ERIK SPOELSTRA: Well, we've talked about it in all the previous three series, so I feel like I'm being redundant. We faced a lot of adversity during the season. We handled it the right way where you are not making excuses about it, the injuries, the changes lineups. Because of all that adversity and the 57 close games that happened, due to a lot of that, it hardened us. It steeled us and we developed some grit, which is what we all want.

We want to be able to have that privilege of having adversity and being able to overcome it. You gain strength from that.

But this is a very tough opponent. They have our full respect, for sure.

Q. In Game 1, you mentioned Max Strus is ignitable despite the poor shooting effort he had in Game 1. How pleased were you the way he got going early in the first quarter, kind of set the tone for you guys?

ERIK SPOELSTRA: Of course, everybody is going to be

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looking at that final number: How many threes did he hit? But he's a winning basketball player. He does winning things defensively. He's physical, he's in the right spots, he's a great block-out guy. He's also a guy that will come in and help rebound. If you give him a task, he'll do it, and that's winning basketball.

Offensively, yeah, it's always great to see the ball go in. But Max has also proven that he can impact winning regardless of whether the ball is going in. He puts in more time than he probably should. He's a masochist, like all of us. He's always going to put in the time. He's ignitable. And we needed every bit of what he did tonight.

Q. Before the series, we spoke to Caleb Martin, speaking about you and Coach Riley, said you are at your best after defeat. Can you run us through your playbook --

ERIK SPOELSTRA: I don't even know how to answer that. It's not about me. This group, we have faced tough times this year. So we have learned how to handle setbacks, things not going our way and just getting to work instead of getting distracted or making excuses or feeling sorry for ourselves.

It's like a muscle that you work on and you get better. We've had more experience at this than anybody else in the league. We've had a lot of crushing losses during the regular season.

Q. Just talk about Gabe Vincent, his output tonight, and also just how incredible his story has been.

ERIK SPOELSTRA: Yeah, we love Nnamdi. We really do. If you don't know that, the national media, because you're not following us, please look that up, Nnamdi. He's a special guy. He really is.

He was with us in the bubble as a two-way guy. He took on I think the toughest role change for a young player. He was a gunslinger, 2-guard. We wanted to develop him into a combo guard, somebody that could organize us, be an irritant defensively, tough, learn how to facilitate and run a team.

I think that's the toughest thing to do in this league, is turn a 2 into a 1. He openly just embraced that. Then he struggled at times with that because you're trying to reinvent yourself. Instead of saying, This is too tough, let me be me, he's really grown the last three years.

He's just an incredible winning player. This year, he's been a starter for us. He's been great. He's off the bench, he's been great. He's like a lot of our guys, the competitive

spirit. You get challenged like we're getting challenged in this series, you hope it brings out the best in you. And that's what it's doing with him.

Q. Just as a follow to that, what do you think has basically spurred his growth?

ERIK SPOELSTRA: Are you talking about Nnamdi, Gabe? I would say that old saying that we use a lot: People severely overestimate what you can get accomplished in a day, and they grossly underestimate what you can get accomplished in a matter of months, years, when nobody is paying attention. And he's the epitome of that.

Q. What about this matchup led to you making the starting lineup change, and what did you like about the way they set the tone there in both halves?

ERIK SPOELSTRA: I wouldn't say that it was a lineup change. I get what you're saying. We just went back to our original lineup. We went with this lineup for 14 games. I didn't have the foresight, I didn't. That's on me.

We had to make an adjustment in that Boston series, and that really was necessary and it worked. Then we're facing a new opponent that we don't really know, and so we just went with what finished that previous series.

But we have been 10-4, 11-4 now with this lineup. Clearly we needed that size and veteran experience and physicality that K-Love brings. I don't know how many minutes -- I don't have my glasses, so I don't know the stats -- but that veteran experience, the dedicated championship-level experience that K-Love and Kyle both brought tonight, there's not an analytic that can show you how valuable that was.

Q. This is probably oversimplifying things, but sometimes when teams play against Jokic, you turn him into a scorer or you turn him into a passer, and he controls the game. He only had four assists tonight.

ERIK SPOELSTRA: Yeah, that's a ridiculous -- that's the untrained eye that says something like that.

This guy is an incredible player. You know, twice in two seasons he's been the best player on this planet. You can't just say, Oh, make him a scorer. That's not how they play. They have so many different actions that just get you compromised.

We have to focus on what we do. We try to do things the hard way, and he requires you to do many things the hard way. He has our full respect.

