

NBA Finals: Heat vs. Nuggets

Monday, June 12, 2023

Denver Nuggets

Michael Malone

Game 5: Postgame



Nuggets 94, Heat 89

Q. Coach, why do you think this is just the beginning for this special group, not the end of a journey, but like you said up on the stage, the beginning of something?

MICHAEL MALONE: You know, Pat Riley said something many years ago. I used to have it up on my board when I was a head coach in Sacramento, and it talked about the evolution in this game and how you go from a nobody to an upstart, and you go from an upstart to a winner and a winner to a contender and a contender to a champion, and the last step is after a champion is to be a dynasty.

So we're not satisfied. We accomplished something this franchise has never done before, but we have a lot of young talented players in that locker room, and I think we just showed through 16 playoff wins what we're capable of on the biggest stage in the world.

The best part about it is the people I just did that with. I love those guys. I love my coaches. Stan and Josh Kroenke are incredible owners. Their support, their continued belief. Calvin Booth, first year as a GM.

And I just have to say on a personal note a huge thank you to my mother and father. I just spoke to them, let them know how much they're a part of this. Their love and support all along has meant the world to me. My beautiful wife Jocelyn, two daughters Caitlin and Bridget. I'm a really blessed person and I'm really enjoying this moment so don't screw it up by asking a stupid question. (Laughter).

Q. First half the three-point shot would not go down. Talk about the fight and feistiness of this team tonight, and second, go back to your parents. I know you text your dad all the time. What does it mean for a coach's son to do your dad proud by winning this championship?

MICHAEL MALONE: Well, to your point, the first question,

foul trouble, Aaron, Nikola, Jeff, I thought DeAndre played a few minutes but he went out there and did his job. So you couple the foul trouble with, we couldn't make a free throw or a three-point shot and we're down seven at halftime. That was my message at the break, was that we haven't played well, we've had foul trouble, we can't make a shot, and we're only down by seven points.

What I was most proud about is throughout the game if your offense is not working and your shots are not falling you have to dig in on the defensive end. I thought our defense tonight was great. The one area that was troublesome was their offensive rebounding. We were defending, we just weren't finishing it off with rebound. Those last couple of minutes the clock seemed like it was just moving really slow, and as you realize what you're about to accomplish, it's almost surreal.

What it means for me, growing up, the son of a coach, he was a CYO coach at Precious Blood parish in Queens. He was a high school coach at Power Memorial Academy in New York City, college coach, NBA coach. And I just told my mother and father, they were not able to be here, but they're with me. They're in my heart. I love them. They have sacrificed for me, my three sisters, my two brothers, and they have paid it forward. I can't thank them enough, and I love them very, very much.

Q. What's it say about Michael to have a rough shooting series and game tonight for the most part and still find ways to be effective down the stretch and on defense particularly?

MICHAEL MALONE: Well, it's a maturation, a continued maturation. We all know that Michael didn't shoot the ball as well as we know he can. That's going to happen at times. This is a great experience for him because I think he realized, as I continue to tell our team, there are no specialists allowed on this squad. If your jump shot is not falling, do something else to help teammates. Not yourself, help your teammates -- defending, rebounding, hustling, whatever it may be.

But I think it's really important, let's not judge Michael Porter just on his shooting in the Finals. Look at his



performance in the Western Conference Finals against Phoenix, against Minnesota and more importantly throughout the season.

Michael is only going to get better, and to have he and Jamal back healthy, this is what I really envisioned a few years ago when we got Aaron Gordon.

Sometimes a dream is deferred, and our dream was deferred for a few years, but we stuck with it, and we added the right pieces. Huge shoutout to Calvin Booth and the job he's done. This is just an unbelievable feeling.

Q. I think I asked you last year at the end of the year as the Avs were going run on their run and the Rams just won, was there any added pressure and you kind of downplayed that. But now with them getting that Stanley Cup last year and obviously the Rams, how good does it feel to know yours is right up there alongside them in the Kroenkes' trophy case?

MICHAEL MALONE: I was just joking with Josh, as the champagne is being sprayed all over the place. I said, Josh, I'm a rookie at this. I really don't know what I'm doing but you're used to this. You've won Stanley Cups, Super Bowls.

But our ownership group has been phenomenal throughout this entire process. Eight years is a long time, and very thankful, as I've said many times, in allowing this to get to this point and win a championship.

Stan and Josh are great owners. They allow us to do our job. I'm just thankful that we were able to add to that.

I've never felt any pressure. There was never any pressure. It was just -- I know they love all their teams, but I will tell you this: Stan Kroenke grew up a basketball fan. He loves his Rams, he loves every other team he has, but he's a basketball fan. He grew up a basketball fan. Josh played Division I basketball. I think this one is really special for them.

I have to really make sure I shout out our fans. That atmosphere tonight was incredible. I remember year one eight years ago, and how far we've come and what we've built and the fans are a huge part of that. What really touched me was somebody showed me the video of Game 4 when we were in Miami and to see 18,000, 19,000 people in this building going crazy, they're a part of this. Our fans are a part of this.

Huge shout out to Nuggets nation for showing up, representing, and a lot of love for them.

Q. Nikola Jokic is now one of 11 players with two regular season MVPs and one Finals MVP. What's it been like to go on this journey, the two of you together?

MICHAEL MALONE: It's been amazing, because you can look at it one of two ways. You can look at it from the basketball perspective, two MVPs, Finals MVP, world championship and everything he's done on the court, and then more important for me you can look at off the court, the relationship, the love that I have for Nikola, his mother and father back in Sombor, Serbia, his brothers Nemanja and Strahinja, his wife Natalija and their daughter Ognjena. They're a wonderful family I've gotten very close to. And I've said this many times before, but Nikola even tonight, he's kind of acting like this was just another game.

He's never changed with all the success, and he never will. It's just not in his nature.

I love Nikola. Eight years, love Jamal, seven years. Been through a lot. Just for all of us to stay the course, to challenge ourselves, to all get better collectively, individually. Yeah, it's great to be a part of such a historically great player who's an even better person, and I mean that sincerely. This is not coach-talk. Nikola is just a great, great man.

Q. Michael, I think after the Lakers series it didn't hit you that you guys were going to the Finals until maybe you were on the flight and you kind of woke up from a dream a little bit. Has it hit you that you guys have won? Have you wrapped your head around it? And if not, when do you think it might hit you?

MICHAEL MALONE: It hasn't hit me, and I don't think it's going to hit me tonight because I'm going to drink too much. (Laughter).

These moments are surreal. I got in the league 22, 23 years ago, and I dreamed of becoming a head coach. Not knowing if I'd ever be given that opportunity. It doesn't come easy, and my father was a head coach once, and he's the best coach I know.

To get to this point, to win a championship is just, as you reflect upon all the people who helped you get here. My high school coach Bobby Farrell at Seton Hall Prep, my prep school Tom Blackburn who passed away last year, the coaches I worked for in college, Pete Gillen, everybody like Greg Kampe, that gave me an opportunity to grow and improve to get to this.

This is like a many, many years-long process, and you don't do it by yourself, and from my family, from my wife,

from my daughters, from my mother and father, from my three sisters and two brothers and everybody else along the way, I want to say thank you for believing in me and supporting me and just giving me that unconditional love all the time.

Q. Back to Michael Porter Jr, what did you think of the spark he gave you late in the third quarter, he had the play where he dribbled the ball through his legs and a minute or two later hit the big three?

MICHAEL MALONE: You know, it's just a stick-to-itiveness, staying with it, not feeling sorry for yourself. It's one of my favorite moments D.H. Lawrence "Self-pity." I hate people that feel sorry for themselves and Michael didn't. I'm not making shots, so what? What else can I do to help this team win a championship. That play where he went between the legs and finished was an amazing play, and that three that he hit you could feel the whole arena, like wow, there is not a lid on the rim. We can actually make shots tonight.

I think it's important for everybody to understand that Michael is a young player. He missed his rookie season. He played nine games last year. I did my radio show a week ago and one of the hosts said, "A lot of people in Denver are wondering if you're going to make a change to your starting lineup." After a win, mind you. I said, no, of course not. Michael Porter is our starting small forward, and he's a big part of our future.

I know next time he's on this stage, he's only going to be better off for going through this experience.

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