

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Wednesday, June 4, 2025

Oklahoma City Thunder

Mark Daigneault

Media Day

Q. You can't really tell anything from that 30 minutes of open shooting obviously. You didn't give anything away. But it just seemed like the group is very loose, as you'd expect them to be. How have they handled the buildup to this? How do you think they'll handle the different feeling you know is coming? How is this group wired to handle that?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: The first thing is, we have to be who we are. We enjoy coming to work every day. That's how our facility is, regardless of whether or not it's the Finals or whether or not anybody else is there.

I encourage them to be that. We have to stay true to who we are in this whole experience. We have to acknowledge the things that are different. There's a lot of different elements around the game. We also have to understand the things that are the same. When the ball goes up in the air, the game is going to come down to the same things. Whether or not you win or lose is going to come down to the same things.

It's okay to acknowledge it's going to feel a little different outside the lines, but we have to understand it's going to be the same inside the lines and that has to be our focus.

Q. Oklahoma City is a unique market. Can you talk about the impact of the Thunder on the fan base and the city?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: The people who have been here since the beginning can speak to what the team has meant for the growth of the city. The city is a lot different than it was when you team first moved here, which is a credit to Mr. Bennett and the vision that he had for what this team could mean to the community.

The community and the team have just a very unique relationship. It's the only professional sports team in town. The fans are unbelievably enthusiastic about the team. I've said this many times before, but when we were rebuilding and we were winning a lot less than we were



losing, the support and encouragement we got from our fans was really telling.

I think it's had a lot to do with our ability to develop young players. When you're a young player in the NBA, you're trying to find your footing, trying to establish yourself. You could be uneasy about that process.

To be in a market where everybody is rooting for you, everybody is supporting you, everybody is encouraging you, and you feel that at the games and in the community, I honestly think that has an impact on our player development. I think our young players have grown up faster and have performed better because they exist in this market.

Q. You've been here for five years. Early years were certainly challenging, like you just said. This roster was built piece by piece. I would like to know when and at what point did you realize that this team was really competing for the title?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: There were very early flickers. Even in those early years, those were challenging years at different times. Certainly they looked like challenging years on paper.

How it felt every day was not a reflection of our record or where our standing was in the league. You could feel that something was starting to simmer. You could feel that some of the seeds we were planting were going to be flowering at some point. There were very early indications of that even in those seasons.

We were confident, even back then, not necessarily that we'd be in the Finals right now. You never know the timing of when things come together. But we were confident that we were building something special and something that had the ability to sustain.

As time went on, there were just more and more experiences that gave us more and more confidence in that. But that belief existed at the earliest point in time. A lot of that had to do with the way the guys were approaching every day, independent of the outcomes of the games, and the ways the guys were competing

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together, regardless of what the final score was in some of the games. There was an uncommon approach that our team was taking. It gave us a lot of confidence early on.

Q. Rick Carlisle has had a pretty solid two and a half decade run as a coach in this league. What has stood out to you about him in terms of his longevity, ability to adapt to different teams, personnel and eras?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, I can't say enough about him and the respect I have for him. I think the whole is better than the sum of the parts. Almost consistently across every year he's ever coached, the team is better than their sum. I think that's a reflection of him. His teams play a clear identity, stay in character through all the ups and downs. That identity has changed over the years based on his teams, the league trends. But his teams are always in character. This year is certainly no exception.

His players play with a lot of confidence. His best players play with a lot of confidence. Role players play with a lot of confidence. They all seem to operate on the high end of their capacity when they're playing with him.

He's got unbelievable endurance in the league. What I'd also say is, like, he's kind of out in front of some trends in the NBA right now. To be somebody that has the experiences that he has, that's very impressive that he's been able to evolve and be a trendsetter even as he's been one of the longest-tenured people in the NBA.

Q. Obviously turnovers have been a huge storyline for your defense all year. Also, you've forced teams into shooting low percentages throughout the season. As you go up against a team that's shot it extremely well, what are some of the key fundamentals defensively that you all are going to need to lean into to kind of combat that battle?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, they're a tall task. The fundamentals are not complicated. It's not like we're out here emphasizing new things. We're not inventing anything this week.

Their attack is very simple. The theoretical way to stop it is simple. In reality it's very difficult to do, as you can see from the way that they've really had their way with everybody.

It's one thing to understand what they're doing, it's one thing to understand what you need to do. It's quite another to execute it. That's what makes them really hard to play against. They pump a 99-miles-an-hour fastball at you. You can prepare all you want for that. When you're in the batter's box, it's different when it's time to hit it. It's going to

be a very tall challenge.

Q. You now have spent over a decade in Oklahoma City. A kid from Massachusetts to the NBA Finals, how surreal is it coming all the way from Leominster to the Finals?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's awesome. It's awesome for everybody. Every single person that's participating in this, whether it's coaches, players, staff, there was a time in their life when this was just a dream. This wasn't a foregone conclusion for them. That's every player that's participating. There's a time when they were in their driveway shooting one-on-one with a basket counting down the end of the game.

That's what makes it so special to participate in. That's why it's a great opportunity for everybody. We're all very humbled and grateful to be a part of it.

Q. Want to ask you about Pascal Siakam and what he lends to Indiana as far as a half-court option. Do you feel you're well suited to counter that?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Easier said than done, just like I talked about their team.

Great versatility on both ends of the floor. Offensively he can play in the pick-and-roll game as a handler, setter. He's an isolation player that can go get them a high-quality shot, he can get fouled, he can post smaller matchups. He's kind of a matchup problem, quite frankly on that end.

Defensively he's one of their best help defenders. He's always eating space like all the help defenders. Got great length. He can play outside, inside. He's about as rangy and versatile a player as you can get at that position.

Somebody we have high respect for and obviously a huge part of the series.

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