

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

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Oklahoma City Thunder

Alex Caruso

Media Day

Q. I just discovered the other day that your dad played in college for Eddie Sutton.

ALEX CARUSO: He did.

Q. How much did he talk about that? Any of your game come from your dad, any influence from Eddie Sutton?

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, he played for Eddie Sutton when he was at Creighton. He vividly remembers practices with no basketballs, especially beginning of the year. Ball rack would be out there practice, practice would start, they'd roll them out, and they'd play defense for two hours.

Some influence from him for sure. I was a ballboy for Texas A&M growing up. I would show up to the games two and a half hours early with him. I would shoot for as many minutes as I could before I had to start rebounding for the guys, do my job on the court during the game.

We would head out, listen to the local radio guys, talk about hoops on the way home, talk about the game, how we played, how the other team played.

Looking back on it, I think that's where probably a lot of my understanding of the game came from. Maybe fast tracked that a little bit. That was 10 years old, might not have been as in-depth as I'm talking about the game now. Basic stuff then. Probably eight to like 14 honestly.

So yeah, stuff like that, just watching basketball with him and talking through the game and having a brain to pick.

Q. When you look at this matchup here against the Pacers, what stands out about this team you're going to face?

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, they're playing at a high level. They've kind of run through their games. They went to six with New York. Their Game 5 wasn't really their best shot. I think other than that, the five games they played in



the series. Won in five in the first two series.

They're playing at a high level. I think their offensive pace, they're fast, they're really pushing the ball, playing with pace even in the halfcourt, which is something that has kind of been the opposite, maybe besides Memphis that we played so far this post-season. Memphis did a lot of that, drive and kick, play early, where the other teams we played were more sets.

Just adjusting back to that and making sure we're ready to run.

Q. As a great defender yourself, what can you tell us about Lu Dort?

ALEX CARUSO: Lu is a phenomenal defender. I think everybody knows that here. Great that he finally gets recognized for that, gets his First Team All-Defensive selection.

We talk about on our team main engines. Usually that means Shai, Dub type players for the other team. For us defensively, Lu is our main engine. When he's into the ball, he sets the pace for us defensively. Whatever his energy is and physicality is on the ball to start kind of sets the tempo and dictates how the rest of us play.

He's a great influence on this team. Obviously, his offense has come around. He's gotten better each and every year to now I think he shot 40% this year on a lot of attempts. That's hard to do in the NBA. That's not something to be overlooked.

Q. What makes you so effective at creating turnovers?

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I think it starts with just competing, relentless competition. You got to want to get a stop every possession. You got to want to have pride in not letting the other team score, letting your guy score. A lot of it stems from that.

Also just an understanding of the game. I've gotten to play around Hall of Fame players, been coached by Hall of Famer players, coaches. Just stealing stuff from them, getting a deeper understanding of the game, anticipating

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what actions are about to happen. Knowing the plays other teams like, knowing how other players play. There's a play against Jokic in the first game where they ran a baseline out of bounds play. I knew if I bluffed and jumped at him he would try quick pass it to Gordon. He ended up throwing it right to me. I don't think I could make that play three, four, five years ago.

Just being really competitive, then trying to learn the game. You learn tendencies, you're able to anticipate stuff.

Q. You have been on a championship team. This team is so young. Do you feel like the guys have sort of seen what is possible here and are sort of head long going into that?

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, we've talked about it within ourselves the whole year, about what our ceiling is, when we play at our best we're a really tough team to deal with.

I might have been not coasting a little, but I obviously don't play at this playoff level intensity throughout the regular season. Nobody does. It's impossible to.

I think once I got onto the stage and I showed the guys. I don't think I really showed them this level the intensity and effort and concentration on the details through the season. I think once they saw that, they were able to kind of pick up on that.

A lot of that, too, is we talk about we're a really young team. We're a really mature team for how young we are. We have an emotional understanding of situations. We have an ability to learn and to improve off of mistakes or off of wins and successes, which is not an easy thing to do for anybody, let alone a young team.

You try to give me some credit and I'll take a little, I guess. But you got to give credit to these guys for having the ability to get better, the ability to understand and have the comprehension to know what's going on.

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