

# NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Saturday, June 7, 2025

Oklahoma City Thunder

Coach Mark Daigneault

Practice Day

**Q. You guys already have been in a situation like this in the series against Denver and you bounced back very well. Maybe next game is not going to be the blowout it was against Denver. How do you control the anxiousness of your team for Game 2?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, we have confidence and wisdom because of the situations we've been in over time. There's no team more confident in being ready to play in any situation than ours -- biased, obviously.

You also have to go make it happen. Those experiences don't guarantee you anything. They certainly don't carry over into the next experience. So, we've got the wisdom from them. We've got the confidence from them. But when the ball goes up in the air tomorrow, the better team is going to win, and we want to do everything we can to be that team.

**Q. You just said, make it happen. With the benefit now of having time to watch the game, what didn't happen for you guys?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's always tricky because one-point losses are emotional, and you have to be able to strip away the emotions from that. Understand there's a lot of things we did well in the game to build a 15-point lead. There's a lot of things we did well in the game that we certainly don't want to throw out.

And there's a lot of things that we can improve on. We have a lot of runway here to improve. And Indiana does, too. I'm sure they don't come out of that game feeling like they played perfectly, either.

That becomes the challenge after Game 1 of a series is you've now felt the opponent a little bit. You've thrown some things out there, learned some things from the game. And now we've just got to improve at some intangible things we think we can improve at. Indiana will try to do the same thing, and the better team will win.



**Q. You guys have been obviously very good after wins this season, too, but after losses, it just seems like it goes up a notch. What, if anything, changes about this group when it is coming off a loss?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I think nothing. That's the trick. You don't want to be reactive to the last game because then you can be too high after wins, you can be too low after losses. We just get ourselves to neutral. Understand every game is different, every game is unwritten. You go out there, the ball goes up in the air, and the team that competes better on that night wins.

That's been a mental habit for us over time, and we try to carry that over to every situation.

It's obviously very important in this situation. I couldn't explain it beyond that. They do a great job of getting themselves to zero and getting ready to compete in the next moment.

**Q. You said on Thursday you wanted to watch the defense in the second half. Curious what you saw. You mentioned disruption was the goal. Were you disruptive enough in the second half?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Not as disruptive as we were in the first half, but that was probably an outlier as well. There's certainly things we could have done better in the second half. I thought we got a little loose on different things, but I'm also careful in these settings, especially, not to take away from what Indiana did.

There's two teams out there playing, and they did a really good job in the second half of that game, certainly in the back half of the fourth quarter to put themselves in position to get a win the way they did.

So they deserve credit for that. Certainly, when the door shuts and we're watching film, we're looking at it through our lens, through the things we can control. We thought we left some things on the table in that game, and I'm sure they feel that way, too. But now we have to start the process of improving and growing in the series.

**Q. It was one of Shai's highest usage, highest shot**

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**attempt, lowest pass-out games of the season. What did you see from his offensive process, and what is Indiana doing to load up on him?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: They are high up the floor on him, both on the ball and with the initial coverage. I don't think that's necessarily specific to him. They have done that quite a bit here in these playoffs. But that's how they showed the other night in Game 1.

We got to the paint collectively as a team a lot. We got in there a lot. We did not convert enough on those plays, obviously. I thought there was just a lot of plays we just didn't finish. We didn't get the juice out of that squeeze. Some of that, again, is a credit to Indiana. I'm not trying to take anything away from the way they played.

But we can be better in those situations, him and everybody else. He wasn't the only one in the paint that game. We have to continue to try to get there. And when we get there, we have to continue to try to find the most efficient shot. I thought we could have improved that from last game.

**Q. What stood out to you about Chet's offensive performance, and what can he do or you guys do to get him going on that end?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I don't think anybody played their best game. So I don't want to -- certainly he didn't play his best game, but I don't think any of us did. That wasn't our best game, flat out, with anybody.

What I will say is like he and Dub, specifically, obviously they have carved out huge roles on our team. They are a huge reason why we're here. They are in an uncommon position for third-year players. These are guys that are in their third year.

Usually delivering in the Finals is not on the curriculum for third-year players, you know, and they have thrust themselves into that situation, which is a credit to them. And now that they are here, they have to continue to do what they have done all the way through the playoffs, which is go out there, fully compete, learn the lessons, and apply it forward.

And they have done a great job of that. I think you've seen that over the course of the playoffs. They haven't always played their best game, but they always get themselves ready to play the next one. The last guy I'm worried about that is Chet.

**Q. I know you spoke about this immediately after Game 1, but the lineup change you made with Wallace**

**for Hartenstein, did you get what you wanted out of that change, and is it something you're going to stick with in the series?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I usually don't address, you know, plans for lineups and rotations in these settings.

What I will say is we have a lot of optionality that we draw on, almost nightly. If you followed our team throughout the season, I think you know that flexibility and adaptability is the only constant. We're never staying the same.

I know we started the same lineup in the playoffs, but our rotation night to night in these series has been incredibly variant. We think that's a strength of our team. I liked how we started the game and I liked, really, everything we did to build a 15-point lead, and then we didn't deliver down the stretch collectively.

But we are always trying to learn from it. I mean, at the end of the day, when you have options like that, you're allowed to move in and out of those options as you see fit. We understand the trade-offs with every lineup we put on the court. We'll continue to try to make every decision we can to give ourselves the best chance to win. That's what we did in Game 1. Didn't turn out in our favor, but that's what we'll do in Game 2 and moving forward.

**Q. People harp on the youth of your team, but they play like 28, 30-year-olds. They play old.**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah.

**Q. To what extent is it self-screening, that whoever comes in the door has to have a certain profile, and to what extent do you overload them to prepare them for the Finals, to have games like they have had?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's very hard, it's a very abstract thing to understand, but we do have an uncommon approach. There's no place we'd rather be than in the Finals, even with a young team. These guys have an uncommon mentality with that, as I've mentioned many different times.

I think Sam does a great job of understanding the person that we're bringing in the door, and we do the best we can to put them in a great environment and help them grow.

How that all comes together, I think the guys deserve a lot of credit for it, the vision they have for themselves. But it's hard to understand exactly why that is.

But I do know, I have great confidence in the mentality of the team, the poise of the team, confidence of the team,



maturity of the team.

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