

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

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Oklahoma City Thunder

Mark Daigneault

Practice Day

Q. I know you have said that you will not talk about the rotation. In the first game you didn't use two big men together and you lose the rebound battle. Use them several minutes in the second game and win the rebound battle. How is that important for the team?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, the general battle we're trying to win is the possession battle. There's different ways to do that. In the first game, we were able to win it with turnovers, which tends to be the way we can win it when we're smaller. In the second game, we obviously rebounded better in those units, which is an advantage when we're bigger.

We have optionality. Every game is different. We try to make sure as the series goes on we're expanding options, not constraining them, and trying to stay aggressive in terms of looking for what's best against our opponent in a given game, knowing every game is different.

We want to have all the options available. We'll draw on them when we think it's advantageous, knowing Game 3 is going to be different than 1 and 2.

Q. Could you talk about Alex Caruso's leadership off the bench, how that's a luxury for you guys, especially coming off his Game 2 performance?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: One thing we talk about with the team is the leaders, the person doing the right thing. That's why he's a great leader, because he's always doing the right thing. He's always competing. He's always present. He's always engaged. He's always inside the team.

When you do the right thing and walk the walk, operate the way Alex does, it gives you an incredible platform to lead both through example, and in his case with the voice as well.

We have leadership all over the roster, a lot of different leaders that do so in different ways. He certainly has his



fingerprints all over the team.

Q. You have often talked about needing to continue to evolve through the series, recognizing that your opponent is not this static thing. Big picture-wise, how are you incorporating that into your daily work and attack with the team in between games?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's a combination of preparation and openness. You need the openness because you don't know what the game is going to be like. You don't know what the opponent could do.

There's a lot of different things that Indiana has shown over these Playoffs that they can pivot to or not. We try not to guess in those situations. But we also want to prepare for every situation.

The one thing we definitely have to be prepared for is just watching them, especially in Game 5 in New York and then Game 6, they made a conscious effort when they came home off a loss to really ramp up the physicality, pressure. That's one thing we have to be ready for coming in here, is understand they're going to be playing with a lot of energy.

They play very well here. They play very comfortable here. We've got to level up to that if we want to give ourselves a chance to compete.

Q. Guessing that this was not a team that was impressed by 60 wins, 65 wins, not a lot of teams winning this many games by double-digit points. Why has this team not really been impressed by itself, by all the outside things, like the winning percentage? Why does it not seem to resonate with this group?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I think there's just a lot of integrity to the team. I think that starts with the makeup that these guys have. Great psychological makeup, competitive makeup, personal makeup. Then over time we've had to really kind of forge into this version of ourselves, in visible spaces.

We haven't relied on anything outside the outcomes, the noise. We haven't relied on that when we weren't winning. We haven't relied on that while we were building. We

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haven't relied on that while we were rising. We're not relying on that now that we're in a different position.

I just think the integrity of how this group has done it and who they are is probably the answer to that question.

Q. What makes Indiana's transition defense so effective off live-ball turnovers, rebounds? You guys had four fast break points in Game 2.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, they've been good at it all year. It's a strength of their team. I think part of it is offensively they get really, really good shots with balanced floors. They're very rarely forced into tough situations. They're low turnover generally. They get really good shots. Usually that is a great starting point with your transition defense.

We had four fast break points, but I thought we ran pretty well and better in Game 2 than Game 1, despite the turnovers in Game 1. I thought we advanced the ball much more up the floor, got some advantageous plays. There was a play where we advance up the floor, got them on their heels. Ball hits Cason, hits Shai, comes out to Caruso for a three. We had more of those plays that don't really reflect fast break points but give us some flow up the floor and have us running on the misses and the turnovers. We have to continue to do that.

There's a reason they're here. They do a lot of things well, and one of them is they get back in transition.

Q. Shai is obviously elite at midrange. Everybody knows that. Why is he able to consistently still be able to get to his spots and create space?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I think there's just a variety to his game. He can get to there a lot of different ways. He'll post. He'll play the pick-and-roll game. He can iso. He finds it in the flow. I think the diversity of that helps.

Then the diversity of his shot profile. He'll pass, get to the rim, he'll shot threes as well. It's not like he's just a fastball pitcher. He's got a lot of different things that he can go to that keeps teams off balance.

In Game 2, especially, he found a great rhythm and such a great blend of those things that he becomes much harder to guard and less predictable when he's doing that.

Q. How has your team's ability to kind of disrupt screening evolved over the last year or two? How has the communication gotten better and the actual physical ability to make teams screen badly against you and blow those things up, how has that gotten

better?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Some of it's personnel. You got to start there. We've got guys that are hard to screen either because of strength or quickness or both. Dort comes to mind. Caruso comes to mind. Dub comes to mind. Cason Wallace, for sure. They're good pursue guys.

Having guys at the rim is helpful. You can't spring downhill and assume there's something good there for you. Hopefully the help is deterring that to a degree.

Then we've just seen more and more pictures as we've gained more experience. We're still learning the league, still learning our own schemes. Guys are still learning their games. A guy like Cason Wallace, as good as he is, he is still learning the pictures. It's a combination of those things.

I think it starts with the defensive personnel, how potent they are with that.

Q. Siakam is someone that poses a lot of different challenges. You've limited his touches in the paint. What has allowed you to be successful in the first two games against him?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I don't want to, like, make that a foregone conclusion at this point. They're coming home. He's going to be very aggressive, Haliburton is going to be very aggressive. They play really well here.

I thought we've done a decent job conceptually against their team in the first two games, which I think the strength of their team is they play a certain way that elevates everybody. I think we've seen that.

You really can't key on an individual player, an individual thing. You really have to defend them conceptually because that's how they're existing on offense.

Just trusting that if you do that, it will lower the overall effectiveness of the individual players. But that's easier said than done. They're just so good at imposing their will on that end of the floor that you really can't take that for granted. As we come here especially, we really have to be on it if we want to give ourselves a chance to continue to do that.

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