

# NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Wednesday, June 11, 2025

## Indiana Pacers Rick Carlisle

### Game 3: Pregame

**Q. We've been making a lot out of Tyrese's aggressiveness, all that. What kind of things can you do to get him going more and to get back to that level of aggressiveness?**

RICK CARLISLE: We have to do everything better as a team. When we do everything better as a team, it enhances all of our guys' abilities to play better. More attention to detail on defense, blocking out. That gets us more rebounds, gets us in transition.

We made more than our share of mistakes with defensive coverages. We can do better there. Better screening is another thing.

Our spatial stuff has got to be better offensively. We've got to get the floor set up the right way. Oklahoma, they're so great defensively, they swarm, they cause all kinds of problems. So we've got to do a better job with reads. That will help Tyrese, along with everyone else.

**Q. Taking you back a few years, can you talk about your relationship with Larry Bird, how important he has been for you as a coach, especially on bringing you back in 2021.**

RICK CARLISLE: Yeah, listen, I mean, I got to play with Larry for three years, my first three years in the NBA were with him. He was the best player in the world. He had been the MVP the previous year that I'd been drafted, then he was in the MVP in '85 and '86. We went to the Finals three straight years.

It's one reason that I've had some exposure to this. Working together with him when I was an assistant coach and he was a first-time head coach was another great opportunity for me. I was going from being a second assistant to now having lead assistant responsibilities, doing practice plans, doing things that helped prepare me to eventually have the opportunity to become a head coach.



Yeah, look, the relationship with Larry, it's just been an amazing journey. He's still consulting with the organization. He's still involved with helping out with the draft. So I don't think you'll see him at the games, but he's around the facility. I think he'll be around a little bit tomorrow. There's some draft workouts. So I'll see him.

Yeah, definitely grateful for all the time that I spent with him over the years.

**Q. This is the first NBA Finals game in Indiana in 25 years. You mentioned when you won the Eastern Conference Finals, the phrase that's popular around here, it's basketball in the other 49 states, but this is Indiana. In your experience, what is special about the sport in this state and the connection?**

RICK CARLISLE: Well, there's a wholesome historic element to it. Certainly the movie 'Hoosiers' is one thing. But IU basketball with Coach Knight all those years. Butler with the runs that they've had over the years when Brad Stevens was the coach there.

The Pacers have great history. Great, rich history going back to the ABA days where they won three championships.

There's a lot of terms thrown out there. It's on the court, We grow basketball here. I've seen that. There's a lot of pride in it. It's meaningful.

**Q. You've quoted a couple times the line from Steve Nash, in the Playoffs when you win, you feel like you're never going to lose again. When you lose, you feel like you're never going to win again. Does it still feel that way or have you gotten past that? If you did, when did you get past that?**

RICK CARLISLE: It's a great quotation because it was made by somebody who was a player. Steve Nash, being a consecutive two-time MVP, an all-time great player. Acknowledging that showed a lot of wisdom is really what it showed.

One thing we've preached all year, as long as I've been coaching, but as you gain more experience, it becomes



more evident that the highs and lows, you've got to try to avoid. You got to try to stay on an even keel. You have to keep a high level of aggression but a high level of poise.

The journey of the Finals is unique because it's spaced out pretty long. There's a lot of two-day gaps where a loss is something that a team can sit with and stew over for two days, and a win can be something that can weaken a team.

Try to acknowledge that and communicate it, but not overcommunicate anything. Try to stay in the present moment as much as possible.

**Q. Your second unit got things going from behind the arc in the first half. Heading into Game 3, is that something that is a point of emphasis or is that something that happens organically?**

RICK CARLISLE: What's this?

**Q. Three-point shooting from your bench guys in the first half in Game 2. Is that something you go into Game 3 as a point of emphasis or more something you like to see happen organically?**

RICK CARLISLE: We have a process that we try to stick with. If we can generate good threes, we love good catch-and-shoot threes like every other team in the league.

They're hard to come by against Oklahoma because of how diverse and versatile their defense is. They have great defenders.

We've got to do a better job. As Ramona asked the question, what can the team do to help player X, every player will function better, and our team will function better with the stuff on margins, if we can do a better job.

**Q. As far as the pickup points, a lot of guards --**

RICK CARLISLE: I'm not going to talk about strategy. If you have another question...

**Q. As far as regarding basketball in Indiana, as you said, it being something that there's a lot of phraseology around it. What is your connection to it outside of coaching? Any hallmark moments you've had regarding it?**

RICK CARLISLE: Basketball in Indiana?

**Q. Yes.**

RICK CARLISLE: I mean, this is the third time I've been

here. I've been here really during three probably different eras of the NBA, which has been quite interesting.

The first time was with Larry. It was a team that most people thought had run its course, needed to be broken up and everything else. Larry came in and really just revitalized it and energized a group of veteran players that had a lot more left than people thought.

It was three Conference Final runs. The third one we were able to get to the Finals. That was amazing.

Then coming back here in '03 through '07, whatever it was, was a completely new team pretty much other than Reggie (Miller) was still here. Reggie was still a guy who looked like he was in his prime even though he was in the later stage of his career. He was great. Guys like Jermaine [O'Neal] and [Ron] Artest, Jeff Foster, [Jamaal] Tinsley had a good run with that group. There were a lot of key guys.

We had a couple really good years, then we had some challenges. Then being back this time, it just kind of all comes I guess full circle.

We've lived in kind of a different section of town each time. That's been good, too, to kind of learn more about things. I'm just grateful. It's a wonderful place. We have great character, not only with guys on the team but support staff and in the organization. Certainly ownership has a lot to do with it, and management.

Feel very blessed.

**Q. Obviously you knew Slick Leonard very well. His wife is here tonight. What can you tell us about your relationship with him personally and what he means with the transition when the Pacers went from the ABA to the NBA?**

RICK CARLISLE: I got to spend a lot of time with Slick. When I was here with Larry, they were very close because they had known each other. I think they both have Indiana roots.

On the road we would... Let's put it this way, we'd spend a lot of time together [smiling]. He was an amazing person, who had amazing stories about the game.

Were you mentioning Nancy? Did you bring up Nancy?

**Q. Yes.**

RICK CARLISLE: Nancy sits right behind the bench. She was gone for a lot of the season. She's back and looks fantastic. It's great to have her back in the building.



But look, I mean, Slick's in the rafters. He has a court named after him at the practice facility. We're not going to forget that guy. He was something else.

"Boom baby!" is something, if nobody's trademarked it or something, they should have. There's a lot of cash there if somebody tapped into it.

He wasn't that kind of guy either. He would want to share it with everybody, so... But I think about him often. His name comes up often. "Boom baby!" You hear it all the time. Certainly wish he was here tonight. In his stead, Nancy will be here, and it will be great to see her.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports