

# NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Friday, June 13, 2025

## Oklahoma City Thunder Alex Caruso

### Game 4: Postgame

Oklahoma City Thunder 111, Indiana Pacers 104

**Q. Shai was terrific down the stretch. Aside from the shot-making, what do you see from his demeanor? He seems so stoic even in big moments.**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, you wouldn't know if it was a preseason game or it's Game 4 of the NBA Finals down 2-1 with him. That's why we have such a good mentality as a group. That's why we are able to find success in adversity.

No matter what's going on, you look at him and he's the same. Underneath that stoic personality or look on the court is a deep, deep-rooted competitiveness. That is sprinkled throughout the whole team.

I much more often than not have seen him come through. I've come to expect it. I'll hype him up and get him to the point. But he never blinks, never shies away from the moment.

**Q. Nothing seemed to come easy for you guys most of the game. Shai sort of lifted you at the end. Early it looked like Jalen Williams was keeping you in it offensively. What have you seen of him both tonight and in this series?**

ALEX CARUSO: I mean, our young guys want to be great, man. Like, they really, really do. They want to be great. Chet has had games in the Playoffs where I think he hasn't played up to his potential in his eyes, then he comes out and he answers. I don't think Dub played his best game last game. I don't think he would say that either. I kind of just expected him to come out and answer the call. He did it early. Started getting downhill, made a couple shots. Even more than that, being good on the defensive end, coming up with rebounds late that we needed.

There's a reason he's an All-NBA player, an All-Star at just I think he's 23, if that's correct. I mean, he's a phenomenal talent.



These guys, to be able to do it without a lot of experience and without being in that moment before, like this is their first NBA Finals, down 2-1 on the road, down 10 at one point in the game, just answering, throwing punches, throwing punches. That can't get overlooked. That's an impressive feat.

**Q. At 3:52 in the fourth, you guys are down three. What did you see from that point on? What are you thinking and feeling? What's being said?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, the way that this place erupts when they go on runs or hit shots, you have to stay present and realize what the actual time and score of the game is. Like, I don't remember the play right before that, but I remember they're a little excited. I think somebody was shooting free throws, right?

When we came to the bench, it was a one-possession game. Even if it makes it, it's a two-possession game with almost four minutes to play. There's lot of possessions left in this game.

We never wavered, never thought we might lose this game. We were concentrating on trying to win it, on trying to solve the puzzle, figure out a way to make plays down the stretch to win the game.

That's just been our focus throughout the whole Playoffs. It started from the whole season, just an extreme belief in each other to make plays and find a way to win.

**Q. You've gained a cult hero status to a lot of NBA fans with your style of play, your appearance, headband. These two games, going back to your time in Los Angeles, you've been a superhero playing these big games. I don't know how much you're into the superhero Marvel/DC genre, but is there any superhero you identify with? What makes you play big in those sorts of games?**

ALEX CARUSO: For the superhero reference, we'll just do Robin because that's the only one I can probably make some similarities to, because I got better players around me that are doing more.



I want to win. I don't care if it's pickup in September before training camp. I don't care if it's Game 45, 50, before All-Star break. If it's the Finals and you're down 2-1, I want to win. That's what I'm focused on.

Over my career, my abilities have gotten better through some work ethic and a little bit of confidence and understanding the moment and having success in the moment. But really fighting through failures. I don't think I played my best game Game 3. My mentality and my focus wasn't sharp enough for being in the NBA Finals to my liking. I wanted to make sure that I came out here and I made sure I had a concentrated effort to play as hard as I could and to make as many plays to help the team win.

That just comes down to really wanting to win, being super competitive. That's why my career is the way it is. That's why I've had success. That's why I'm still in the NBA. That's why I'm here talking to you right now.

**Q. Mark mentioned in the huddles coming down the stretch that J-Will was a guy who had a voice in those huddles. What allows a younger guy who wasn't really playing to have a voice in a team's huddle?**

ALEX CARUSO: It's been great to see the growth of our team 1 through 17 through the season. For certain guys, it's different. Maybe it's being a better defender, maybe it's being more confident in your shot.

J-Will has a very unique ability to be vocal. That's a God-given ability, something that comes to him naturally.

I think he's seen maybe a little bit through me and definitely through Kenrich Williams of speaking up when there's a time when guys need it, when the energy is bad, we just went on a 0-5 run, the other team forces us to call a timeout. He has a great ability to lead, and I think he's learning that. As a young player to have that ability to be vocal and be confident in yourself and confident enough that the guys are going to listen to you, it's a great skill. It's something that he's been working on. I don't think he even knows he's been getting better at it, but he has.

**Q. I believe you had 20 points tonight. When did you realize you were going to maybe need to do a little bit more offensively than you normally do? You were hitting some tough shots, a lot of one-on-one plays. How much confidence do you have in those moments?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, each series presents a different challenge and presents a different puzzle to be figured out. The way that Indiana is playing, it's leaving opportunities for supplemental offense for other guys. That

was part of what I spoke about earlier with Game 3, I don't think I was aggressive enough. I think I made a couple bad reads on the perimeter. I don't think I tested the paint enough. I just didn't feel like I was doing the same amount of work that I did in Game 1 and 2, where I found success and we found success as a team.

Just being ready to be a basketball player. A lot of times during my career, it's been guard the best guy, spot up on the wing or set pick-and-rolls and get to the dunker. This series, this Playoffs really, teams are forcing me to try to the ball. That's something that I've been working on for the last three, four years of my offseason. It's been long offseasons not in the Playoffs. So I've had a lot of time to work and prepare and get to the point where I knew this was going to be the scout, take away the best players on the team and make the other guys beat you.

Just being confident in myself and being confident in the work I'm putting in and recognizing opportunities.

**Q. You were talking about in the context of J-Will learning how to be vocal and comfortable learning that. When did that start for you, that you could be the voice?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I think each level of basketball that I've been at, I've been able to kind of manipulate that and mold that into something else. In high school I was the best player on my team. It was easy. By the time I got to my senior year of college, I was the best player on my team, one of the best players on my team. It was natural to be in a leadership role.

Then we get into professional basketball, it's a different dynamic, right? I've had many years of working on that and seeing older players, better players, Hall of Fame players, coaches be able to communicate with people on a different level, depending on who you are, get a message across.

Some of that was credited with watching those older guys and how they operate and seeing that communication works, communication is necessary for success. You can decipher a game through communication, through the margins of the game.

It's like I said with J-Will, it comes a little natural to me. I want to win, so if it's something I think is important, I'm going to say it, even if I'm maybe off track or somebody will correct me.

It's just something over time that I've seen great players do, so I was like, I might as well do it, too.

