

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

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Oklahoma City Thunder

Coach Mark Daigneault

Practice Day

Q. Last game, Pascal was playing very well through three quarters, but last quarter he had only one shot. Was there a special adjustment, or do you think that the pressure on the ball was enough to get him out of the game?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: None of our adjustments are really personnel specific against this team. As I've mentioned, they play as a whole and as a unit, and you have to defend them as a whole and as a unit. That's been our mentality as a team.

You have to trust that if you do that, you can limit as best you can the effectiveness of very good players like him. Even if you do that, they are going to get the best of you on certain possessions or certain nights. But we're doing the best we can.

Q. It's been a good four games, a lot of back-and-forth. When you're in it, do you take a second to say, this has been a pretty good four games?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: We just appreciate the opportunity. We appreciate the opportunity to play this deep into the season. If you're playing this deep into the season, your opponent is going to be really good. They have won 12 games to get to this point just like we have. You just know it's going to be an unbelievable level. There's definitely times in it where, man, this is a high, high level. I've definitely felt that not only in this series but multiple series. But we're also trying to make the next best decision, win the next possession. So we're zoomed in on that as well.

Q. You talked after Game 4 about the lineup change and you said you wanted to get Isaiah more minutes. Did that change enable you to tinker with the rotation so Shai had more in the tank in the fourth quarter? And then also, prior to that, your starters had really dominated in their minutes and then they didn't with the new change. So how do you reconcile with that going into Game 5?



MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, every game is different, first of all. But what I'd say is, the initial thought kind had its desired effect, to your point, in terms of the starts we were able to get off to.

But your starting lineup also is the first rotation decision you're making and has domino effects to the rest of your rotation. I thought in that game we benefited from starting the rotation that way, even though to start the game, we gave up 20 points in the first five minutes, which isn't ideal.

So it's a little bit of both. But we just thought it gave us the best chance to win Game 4 after looking back at the first three games. But every game is different. Like we've done it, after wins, after losses, throughout these series, we move things around pretty quickly to try to stay unpredictable and also try to scrape for every advantage we can in what turns out to be close games.

Q. Along those lines, I think before two games ago, Alex had only gone 30-plus minutes twice the whole season. Both of the last two games, 30-plus minutes. I know you've talked about needing to keep the governor on him even to protect him from himself sometimes. How do you balance that preservation versus going for the kill with his minutes at this time of year?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I haven't talked about being conservative with him at all this time of year. I think this is the time you've got to do everything you can to try to win the games and pull out all the stops. That's been the mentality. He's been great. Extra rest in the Finals for all the players is a consideration, and you get a lot of rest between games. There's advantages and disadvantages. But one of the advantages is for everybody to recover and be as fresh as possible going into the game.

Q. I know you talked about Chet's temperament and how he draws on performances that he's not very fond of. What have you seen from him and Jalen this postseason after games that maybe they are not very okay within their eyes?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Same as always. They are unbelievable competitors. They grow through their



experiences. They just take a great approach to being growing players on a big stage, playing in the best basketball you can imagine.

I think zooming out from just them, these playoff series, at no point during the regular season do you play a great team four straight times with the ability for that team to lock in on tendencies and change tactics and all the things that happen in a playoff series.

So as a result of that, you're just going to get pushed to the limit in these series when you play a really, really good team, a great team over and over and over again. Your opponent gets pushed to the limit by you in the same way. We've seen that now in multiple series where we've gotten taken to the limit by our opponent, and vice versa. We've done that to people as well.

I think understanding that's what it is and embracing that and understanding that there's nothing easy about that, it's very uncomfortable for individual players and for the team collectively, and like I said, the awareness of that and then the mentality of embracing that challenge is critical.

We have players that embrace challenges. That serves us well in terms of being able to keep our foot on the gas when we're doing well or bounce back when we're not.

Q. What's it like not only yourself as a first-time head coach, I know you can't really reflect in the middle of a series, but also a team that's so young relatively to be in a Finals, how are they responding to all of those challenges, physically, mentally absorbing the game plan flips and all these things, just stepping away from wins and losses? How is your group managing it?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I think pretty well. It's challenging. It is our first time going through it, so there's new experiences that we're going through. But I think our default approach serves us well when we're in new situations and things like that.

But it's challenging. We're playing against a great team that is pushing us to the limit, and hopefully we are pushing them to the limit in the same way. But there's nothing comfortable about these games. It's a challenging opponent that is really testing us.

Again, we just need to approach those challenges as opportunities. That's what our guys do. They do a great job of it. We have to be better. We did not control that [last] game. We won it, fortunately, but we did not control that game. We have to almost approach this like a loss in terms of really need to go look in the mirror and make some critical adjustments if we want to give ourselves a

better chance to control Game 5 and not just hope to win it.

Q. How have you seen Dub's game evolve the first few years you've had him all around and specifically as a guy that you can say, hey, you're running point, you're a primary initiator and take pressure off Shai?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: When he started with us, and this has been our approach with most players, it's not like we just hand them the ball. We put them in the system first, and the guys that are really efficient in the system, they end up banging the door down and show you that they need more. He was in that category.

He came off the bench early on. We weren't pushing every button for him, but he just kept showing the ability to take more of a load. His efficiency was not dropping off, and his impact wasn't dropping off. If anything, it was increasing. Usually when those guys are doing that, they are declaring themselves, and he certainly declared himself.

Now he is learning all the lessons to be learned in that role.

I thought in Game 3, his first stint was one of his worst stints of the series. He catches his breath and reflects on that. He had a much better stint later in that game and then came out and was really big time for us in Game 4, not only his creation but just some of the simple plays he made to put his teammates in advantages.

As much as Shai closed the game, I thought he really kept us afloat in a lot of different periods in that game. But he's still a third-year player. He's still learning. He's still growing. And like I said, this is challenging, playing a great team over and over again.

Q. Coach [Marvin] Mack's presence in the hallway. Been there since the New Orleans Hornets played here. Pretty decorated women's basketball coach, high school coach. I don't know if you ever talked about coaching and knew about that background, but just his presence and him as a coach?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, he'll pop me with advice from time to time, and I take note. We take pride in -- and this isn't our idea from a basketball standpoint, but organizationally and as a city, we take pride in people having a first-class experience when they are here. Hopefully you guys feel that. Hopefully our fans feel that. We want the other teams to feel like that.

We want this to be a great basketball environment and a great basketball experience for anybody that is here, whether they play for us or not. He is in the visiting team section there, and I think he's a small contributor to that in the most subtle ways. He's a great guy to interact with.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I think he treats everybody with respect and dignity. I think everybody in that crew, they help create a great environment to have great fans. We have great fans and they support that in their own way. So it's not only him, but he's a great presence. I love hanging with him.

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