

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Sunday, June 15, 2025

Indiana Pacers

Coach Rick Carlisle

Practice Day

Q. I remember early in the Cavs series, you were asked about why there is no momentum in playoff series. You guys had a good discussion about it, but applying that to now when you're in the Finals and it's 2-2 and you had the loss that you had, does the fact that games don't seem to carry over, does that make moving on from what happened easier to get ready for Game 5?

RICK CARLISLE: I'm not sure I understand what your question is. Say it again?

Q. The fact that there doesn't seem to be momentum that carries over from one game to the next in a playoff series, does that make it easier to move on from as tough of a loss as you had in Game 4?

RICK CARLISLE: I don't know. I think there's momentum. I mean, it's hard to exactly gauge. I think maybe some of it fades with longer stretches between games. But between 3 and 4 was one day. I thought we had -- I thought there was momentum there. I thought we played well for three quarters and struggled in the fourth, and had a much better start in that game.

I don't know. Haven't given it a lot of thought. It's kind of, you know, for us and for the coaching staff and the players, analyzing momentum is not really part and parcel to what's going on right now and having to do a better job going to get the ball off the boards and avoiding fouls and things like that. But interesting question.

Q. How is Jarace Walker doing? Will he be able to practice today?

RICK CARLISLE: No, he is doing better. He is off crutches and he is walking with a slight limp now. So it's very unlikely that he'll be able to play in this series.

But he is doing better. It would be great if he was available because I do think he would help us.



Q. Pascal in the last game had a great first three quarters with 20 points, But he had only one shot in the last quarter. What is the problem that you couldn't find him in the rhythm to keep playing?

RICK CARLISLE: Yeah, talked about it yesterday. That can't happen. He is a guy that if we are not playing through him, he needs to touch the ball more. The problems that hindered us in the fourth quarter were an inability to rebound the ball, unnecessary fouls. Those things have us taking the ball out of bounds after they score or having to take it out after a free throw, and then they can really set their defense. Then the game becomes slower.

Doing better in those two areas, the rebounding and the fouls, that will help us. But it's a challenge. They put a lot of pressure on you in the fourth quarter. They have got some great, great players that cause major problems.

Q. You were up double digits at one point in the third quarter and had control of the game. But in the fourth, you were outscored 31-17, and then eventually you lost the game. How much does that kind of a loss affect the team mentally or physically, especially in a playoff series? And how much of a role do you think officiating played in the last game?

RICK CARLISLE: Well, I mean, tough losses are a part of a playoff series. It's just if this was easy, they would be pulling people off the street to play in the NBA Finals and coach and do what you guys are doing. You guys are the best in the world. Everybody else here is perceived to be the best in the world at this moment. So it's difficult.

But you look at it, you take it for what it is and it becomes pretty clear the things that you need to do to be better. Our job as a staff is to take those things, simplify them, communicate to them in a simple, concise way so we can do better. And so you know, that's it.

As far as officiating, I think it's awful some of the things I've seen about the officiating, and Scott Foster in particular. I've known Scott Foster for 30 years. He is a great official. He has done a great job in these playoffs. We've had him a lot of times. The ridiculous scrutiny that is being thrown



out there is terrible and unfair and unjust and stupid.

Q. I had a Pascal question, but now you have me curious. When you're in the middle of the Finals, I don't know your consumption habits. What came your way in terms of Scott and the commentary that --

RICK CARLISLE: I'm not getting into it. I've said what I'm going to say. If you have another question, ask it. If not, we'll move on.

Q. Sure. I've heard that you were a fan of Pascal long before you guys obviously went out and targeted him. When did he first cross your desk as a guy that was special? And when you got him in the building, as a leader, what have you seen from him beyond his talent as a leader with your group?

RICK CARLISLE: He is extremely versatile. I don't know -- was Dwane Casey the coach when they drafted him? I think he may have been. Dwane did a great job of developing him, and they had him with the 905 in the G League. He really had to earn his way.

As you watch a guy's career, as he ascends, coaches take note of the steps that players have had to take to get to where they are. I always thought that the fact that he had to really earn it and that he had continued to get so much better, so much better and appeared to have this humility about how he approached everything just made him very special.

So, a year and a half ago now, when we had the chance to trade for him, there was no doubt to me that he would fit into our team and adjust to our system. But frankly, there was no doubt to me that he would fit into any team, any style and play at an extremely high level.

And so we're fortunate to have him. His experience has been a major part of the growth of our team and our young guys over the last two years. We've just got to make sure that he gets more than one shot in the fourth and that he's touching the ball more.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your defense and the growth that you guys have had really the last -- since the start of last year until now. What did it take for you guys to get to the level that you're playing at in the Finals and throughout the playoffs?

RICK CARLISLE: Well, it's been -- first, it was a decision that this is important and we had to get the players to co-sign on it, and they did.

We just went to work. This was December of -- I guess it

was '23, when we kind of had that moment of, you know, this offensive barrage is not going to hold up, which we were putting on the whole league.

So we went to work. Jenny Boucek has been a big part of this. Her and Jim Boylen work our defensive stuff. Jenny is the one during games that is in charge of matchups, changing defense, all kinds of stuff. She does an amazing job.

It's not just the coaching of it. There's a relationship-building element that is absolutely critical to recruiting a group of players, young players, over to your way of thinking when it comes to something like defense; that in today's age of young players and development, this is not something that players in the AAU level are leaning into saying, you know, I can't wait to get in there and do the shell drill and do things like that.

So we have exceptionally great guys on our team, as does Oklahoma. Oklahoma has been building their defensive thing for many years now. They have done a terrific job. But if we were going to ever get to this point, our defense had to get better, and Jim and Jenny have had great impact on that.

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