

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Wednesday, June 18, 2025

Oklahoma City Thunder

Mark Daigneault

Practice Day

Q. Mark, you guys have had some difficulties in passing the ball on the road. You have 13 assists per game. Is that a thing that you're looking forward to improving, to make the ball move a little bit better?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, we have to play better offensively out here to win the game tomorrow. They do a great job at home. They play with a lot of energy. They really pressure. They're up the floor. We can expect them to bring that tomorrow.

So we have to play with the requisite force in order to counter that if we want to give ourselves a chance to compete.

Q. The stat that's been going around a lot, about no NBA leading scorer winning the championship since 2000. Does that tell you anything about the way this sport has evolved? What does it say about Shai being in a position to potentially buck that trend?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I don't know. I have a hard time with the trends and analyzing those. I'm not the most equipped person to do that.

We're dialed in on Game 6, to be honest with you. But yeah, Shai's incredible. He's a great teammate, great player. But we're focused on Game 6.

Q. For years now you have tried to take a really tactful approach to situations where the opposing team either doesn't have one of their top guys, a guy that is limited. What do you draw on past experiences going into this game where Haliburton's status is unclear?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Haliburton is a great player. One thing we know is you don't underestimate great players. So in the case that he plays, we're expecting his best punch. Indiana is a great team. We don't underestimate great teams.

In either case, whether he plays or not, we're expecting



Indiana's best punch, especially at home. We'll be prepared for the best punch for both him and the team.

Q. You talked about uncommon maturity. In what ways has Cason showed you that in this series?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, he's the man. I thought he did a good job in his minutes in the first couple games. I didn't think he shot the ball well obviously. So that can be loud. It had the desired effects in terms of playing him the way we did on transition defense and perimeter point of attack. Despite the shooting, he was in the starting lineup, he just comes out with great confidence in Game 5 and steps up to the shots, makes big plays, and incredibly impactful against this team.

We're going to need him tomorrow. We're going to need everybody.

Q. I remember a couple years ago in LA you coined the phrase 'competitive empathy.' Do you need to have a conversation like that with your team, addressing where they might be mentally, given you are one win away from a championship?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Hopefully we have that habit built. It's really the way we look at all these things, is there is no new material right now. We're always trying to put ourselves in the opponent's shoes, understand what the opponent is going to bring to the game, prepare for our opponent's best punch in every situation. 0 0 mindset, despite what's going on in a series, last game, whatever.

We're not introducing any new concepts right now. We're just leaning on the psychological habits we've tried to build over a long period of time.

Q. Looking back at the 2022 draft, Chet and Jalen these days seems like one of the craziest hauls of this past decade. Do you remember what you thought about that draft then and how do you feel about it now, what comes to mind about getting those two guys in the same draft?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I'm not really in a reflective state right now. But they're great players. We take every draft,

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Sam does a great job identifying the guys we think can help. We start the process of developing those guys, see where it goes. Obviously, it's gone great with those two guys. They've done a great job. We're going to need their best tomorrow in Game 6.

Q. When Sam did his preseason meeting with your reporters, he talked for like an hour and never said the word 'championship', but it's clear what the expectations were. How did you create that concept of championship culture, belief, championship aspirations without putting that championship burden, that label, on this team? How have you grown without hammering that word home over and over?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I think if you want to accomplish anything, you have to stack to it. If you want to accomplish any goal, it starts with what you can do today to step towards that goal.

We've tried to take a stacking mindset to everything we've done. Even when the team was rebuilding, you can't fast forward that process. You have to be very present in the process and just stack days, stack possessions. We want to win the game tomorrow, but the most important thing we need to do to win the game tomorrow is prepare today and prepare tomorrow and play the first possession really well, then the next possession, then the next possession. That's how we try to approach a game. How we try to approach the Playoff series. How we try to approach every single day and let that win the day. If do that, you can put your head on the pillow that night and know you gave it everything you have.

The minute you start to drift mentally into the past, it affects your ability to stack the next thing. We try to stay very disciplined to that.

Q. When it comes to Shai and Jalen, the shots distribution, the scoring opportunities, how much of that is art and how much is science?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, most of the great players are art. They're incredibly unique. They have unbelievable skill sets. That's every great player. Siakam is like that. Haliburton is like that. They're one of one, all the great players are.

A lot of it for us is just trying to help every player on our team maximize their individual style of play. Obviously those two guys have very broad styles because of all the things they can do. They deserve the credit for what they're able to do out there on the court.

They're great players, but they do it inside the team. It

doesn't suffocate our team. It doesn't take away from our other players' abilities to impact the game. That's why the team's been successful.

Q. You guys were the second-best defensive team in the league last year. Obviously the best this year numbers wise. How far back does making defense your calling card go?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I think whatever our calling cards are, similar to the answer about our mindset, I like to think that they go back as far as the beginning of this build when Dort and Shai and Kenrich Williams were a part of the team.

We've evolved and we've definitely improved some things. Hopefully most of the big rocks are things that are very familiar even back then. That was our mindset back then, is to plant the right seeds and to have the right themes and have the right emphasis so that we weren't reaching a point of changing that.

There's no, like, day you become you don't know what day it's going to be that you become a good team. We've tried to stay very consistent. It's served us well. Now that we're in high stakes environment, it's comforting because it's familiar.

Like I said, there's no new material. We're not walking in today with a new riff. We're walking in and pounding away at the same stuff we've been pounding away at for five years.

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