

# NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Thursday, June 19, 2025

Oklahoma City Thunder

Mark Daigneault

Game 6: Pregame

**Q. My interpretation of the whole 0-0 thing is you're working sort of for tomorrow and not June. This is June, potentially the last game of the year. How does that maybe mean something different now?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: The same habits that we've bet on over time are what's relevant in these situations. Like I said yesterday, there's no new material. Same fundamentals on offense and defense are going to matter tonight in the game. Same preparation over the last couple days. Same psychological habits such as that are going to be relevant. That's why we emphasize them so continuously, so when we're in these high-stakes situations, we're in a mode of familiarity, which I think gives us confidence.

**Q. With respect to all that, understanding all of it, this is a high-stakes situation you've not been in before. How successful have you been in trying to make this seem normal?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Well, it's not the first time it's been the first time. We've gone through a lot of new experiences together. Haven't pretended that we're more experienced than we are. We've tried to lean on the things that we know have made us successful and put us in this position. Continuing to bet on those in these situations.

The guys have done a great job. Obviously, like I said, a high-stakes situation. Those stakes are actually a distraction when you boil it down. The most important thing right now is Game 6 and the first possession of Game 6, then the next possession and the next possession after that. We have to root back into that.

We're human, probably going to drift at different times. That has to kind of be our anchor as we go through the game.

**Q. You're just one win away from the championship. For those who have been watching your team play the way they were back in 2012, the same anticipation,**



**loyalty, but different era, what part of your game best represents OKC basketball?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I mean, we're just proud to represent the city and the organization. I think the way that these guys compete together is the best expression that we can have. The guys go out there, they're highly competitive and they do it together. That's what we'll do tonight. Regardless of how the game unfolds, we're going to go out there and compete as a unit. The guys have done a great job of that to this point. I think that's the most relatable way we can operate for our fans and for everybody.

**Q. How have you seen Shai's leadership manifest itself over these past couple days?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Same as he always is. He really doesn't change in any circumstance. You could look at him in any situation, and it's pretty consistent. He's got an unbelievable ability to be present, poised, but confident. He'll bring that to the game tonight, too.

We got a lot of guys like that. I think one of the great qualities of this team is the consistency of approach. We've seen that over the last 48 hours. We've seen that throughout the Finals. This isn't the first big game we've played in these Finals. They've all been big.

**Q. How do you see that affecting the other guys?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: His confidence is certainly contagious. He's been huge. That's not just right now. That's been continuous through time. He's always had kind of an uncanny ability to stay confident through all the ups and downs, stay consistent and grounded even when we're in the ups. I think there's a contagiousness to that. I've said that many times.

I think Dort's fearlessness and competitive spirit. Kenrich Williams' program-first mindset and confidence are really bedrocks of our team. We need those guys and everybody in the game tonight.

**Q. There's a lot of distractions in today's world. A lot of highlights, getting on TV. Your team seems to have**

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**the even-keeled mindset. How have you been able to keep that up to now?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Starts with who they are. They're great competitors. They're intelligent people. They understand what they need to do to be successful. Then there's kind of a contagiousness to that around the locker room. They've done an incredible job of that staying focused.

Obviously tonight will test that, as all these games do. I have the utmost confidence in the team's ability to stay present and to compete together possession by possession in the game.

**Q. Have you seen the guys look to Caruso any more as you go deeper into the Playoffs?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's hard not to. He's a very prominent voice. He's very extroverted as a competitor. So that puts the spotlight on him inside the team quite a bit.

But it's a pretty flat thing. I think what's unique about our team and probably Indiana is that everybody brings something different, and everybody brings something inside of who they are.

That's just who he is. We get a lot of leadership from a lot of different people, all across the roster, not just the guys who play the most. I mentioned J-Will after the game one of those nights. I think that what makes the team function the way it does. Everybody has their fingerprints on it. He certainly does.

**Q. You mentioned earlier in the season you have to have a menu to prepare. With Tyrese, him being able to play tonight, but you don't know to what degree, is there a heightened sense, how do you approach a guy who is very good, but working through something?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: In terms of the menu, every game is different. We don't know what Indiana is going to do, but we don't guess. We prepare, get in the game, react to what's happening.

As it relates to Haliburton, I said it yesterday, I'll say it again, he's a great player. If there's one thing we know, you don't underestimate great players. In this situation, we're expecting his best punch. Indiana is a great team. We're expecting their best punch.

I have no doubt he's dealing with stuff, but we're expecting him to come out and play like a great player would play. We have to prepare for that. That's how you maintain full respect of the opponent.

**Q. How are you going to celebrate if you win tonight? Would you maybe prefer to win at home? Separately, what are the plans regarding Nikola Topic for the next season or this summer?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: You're really hitting the whole continuum right now [smiling]. I'm just going to skip to the second part.

I've said before Nikola Topic has shown a very unique professionalism and maturity. He's really impressed people with his approach. It's hard to be out for the season. You're on the team, but you're not as connected to it as the rest of the guys.

He didn't travel to many games. Functional things like that. During practice he's working on rehab. He's not out there every practice. That's hard because I think you at times it can be pretty dark and you feel pretty detached. Yet he's maintained an unbelievable consistency, approach, maturity. Those things bode well for him. It's even more impressive with how young of a person he is.

**Q. I was asking the guys the last days where they have their mental strength from. They have a mental coach or something because they're so locked in. They keep saying it comes from you, how you teach them. You're also still a very young coach. Where did you get that from, that you know how to teach them to be mentally strong?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I would argue it comes from them. One of the things when we started the Playoffs that I thought a lot about is just making sure that they be who they are. I think that's been my biggest job since the Playoffs started. We just need to be who we are and bet on that because it's enough.

They're great competitors. They have great makeup. They compete together. They approach things the right way. They're great workers. So a lot of my role I think is just helping them tap into that. That's what I try to stay focused on during this run.

**Q. You were eliminated in the second round last year. The year before that you were in the Play-In Tournament, didn't make the Playoffs. How did you grow so fast as a team?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I think just staying present, not having assumptions, letting things unfold. When you just attack every day, you stack the days, you stack the possessions, stack the games, that's going to take you as far as you're capable of in that moment.



So we're obviously further now than we were then. I thought we maxed out what we were capable of at those times. I think that's the value of that type of approach. We need to approach that tonight. Tonight is a game we really want to win. But the best way to do that is just be present in the moment, stack the possessions, throw our best punch and see where that lands us.

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