

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Saturday, June 21, 2025

Oklahoma City Thunder

Mark Daigneault

Practice Day

Q. Mark, you talked at the beginning of the series about the respect you have for Rick Carlisle. What's it been like to sit on the other end of chessboard against him for seven games?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Humbling. Humbling. He's a great coach. Their team plays with a ruthlessly consistent identity. They really compete. They are never out of a game. They have done an unbelievable job collectively of building the team to the point where they can get to this point and perform the way they have to this point.

It's been the case, there's not a lot of nights where you feel like you're at an advantage from a coaching standpoint. There's great coaches in the league, and he's certainly right at the top of the list.

Q. You often talk about simplicity in your message and tactics. How key for you is it tomorrow that your guys are playing instinctually and not thinking here in a Game 7?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Critical. Critical. I think that's the deal. You want to be prepared. You certainly want to learn the lessons, get the game plan into the game, but not at the expense of aggressiveness, confidence, instincts. I think that has been a strength of ours this season. We certainly have to lean on that.

We have to understand the work is done and we have to trust the work. The muscle is built. We have to flex that muscle. That's what tomorrow will come down to for us.

Q. We talk about Game 7 pressure on players. How much pressure is it on coaches in general, you in particular, to make the right scheme adjustments, direct the right rotations, those kind of things?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I always feel a ton of pressure, but the pressure is not external. It's not like a game circumstance. It's not a situation. It's the internal situation of doing right by the players, serving the team, putting the



team in the best possible position to be successful. Especially this team. It's a group of guys that I love coaching.

I feel a great sense of responsibility to them, a great sense of responsibility to the organization, the city. In every circumstance, though. That's a fire that keeps on burning regardless of circumstance.

Q. There are a lot of statistics that explain outcomes of the games in the series, but the intangibles have an impact on everyone. Effort plays, playing with force, imposing your will. Is there any way to prepare your guys to win those types of battles or do you just have to hope they come out with the requisite energy?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's a contest of wills. I think the reason it swung between the two teams is because these are two teams that have leaned on that heavily to get to this point. It's two teams where the whole is better than the sum of the parts. It's two teams that are highly competitive. Two teams that play together. Two teams that kind of rely on the same stuff for their success that are squaring off against each other. You're not going to exist in the win column of that on a possession or even obviously in a series for either team.

I agree with you that those things have defined the games of the series. I think both teams understand that. Both teams are going to try to do that tomorrow, and the better team will win.

Q. I know you're acutely focused on what happens between the lines tomorrow. But Game 7s obviously have a lore in sports and you've long told us you're a sports fan of many things. Kind of put us inside being involved in a Game 7 in a championship series, your appreciation for that.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It's a privilege. It's a privilege for everybody that gets to participate. It's an unbelievable thing and an unbelievable experience. Both teams have earned the opportunity to experience that.

We're going to enjoy it. We're going to throw our best punch. Go out there and be who we are. But it's a

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privilege to play in a Game 7 in the NBA Finals. No one is skipping that in this whole thing. But once the ball goes up in the air, the game is still going to come down to the same things and we have to be able to focus on that, despite the fact that we are grateful for the opportunity.

Q. For a team that obviously plays very physical on the defensive end, you guys are not afraid to foul, and you don't go over the line either. Had almost no techs. Shai got one for waving a towel, supporting his teammate --

MARK DAIGNEAULT: It was rescinded.

Q. It was rescinded.

MARK DAIGNEAULT: For the record.

Q. Is it an organizational taproot, like we are just not going to get technical fouls, or is that the way the guys are, they are just not privy to going over that line?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: First of all, we are physical, but I think we've done a great job -- there was a point in the season where our free-throw differential was not only the lowest in the league but lowest in history, in the modern history of the NBA. We really dug into that and tried to make sure that we were putting ourselves in more positions to get fouled with the force we were playing with on offense, which I think has shown in the playoffs. Dub specifically is a guy who made huge jumps there.

And then defensively, understanding legal and illegal physicality. We don't want to take illegal fouls. I want to be very clear on that. We want to play physically, but we want to play legal and not put our opponents on the line or in the bonus.

As far as the technicals, it's not a thing we talk openly about. First of all, I respect the officials. I think our team respects the officials. We understand that that's an imperfect job. It's not going to be perfect. They are trying to get it right. We really just try to focus on what we can control, not because of anything other than that's the best pathway to play your best and it's the best pathway to win. We have hopefully a culture of focusing on what we can control and blocking everything else out.

Jenni mentioned Game 7s and the lore of that. The outcome of the game and the context of the game is outside of our control. In between the lines is inside our control. The referees is in that category, too. We can't control how they call the game and what they put a whistle on and what they don't. We can control a lot of other things in the game, and that's what we need to focus on.

Q. There's not many guys on either side that have played statistically to their season average. Just the quality of the defense being played. But one guy is Pascal Siakam. Are you okay with that and is there a reason why he's been able to play to his level, and how do you get him off that?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: He has had some quiet games in the series, as all great players do in a playoff series, because you're playing against a great team. The deeper you go, the better the competition tends to be. Then you're playing against a great team over and over and over again, which is an experience you just are not getting in the regular season.

There's no point in the regular season where you play a great team seven straight times, and as a result of that, great players, great teams, they vacillate in and out of everything. To Chris' question with the intangibles, it's very hard to sustain the same things over and over again, which is why in a playoff series some teams win games or lose games and why some players have really loud great nights and then they have quieter nights.

I think we generally have done a pretty good job in the series and so has Indiana, and that's why it's 3-3. Now it just comes down to who plays better tomorrow.

Q. Why do you think that the much bigger difference between your wins and losses in this series has been on your offensive end of the floor and not just shooting, but also turnovers, offensive rebounding, free throws?

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I'm not pointing out anything that's not obvious. Our defense has been more consistent in these playoffs especially than our offense has.

I think generally, offense is harder in the playoffs for everybody. The same is true for Indiana in this series. Their offense is not where it was in the regular season or even earlier in the playoffs. I think it's just harder to score when you play a team over and over and over again.

We've got to continue to try to find solutions with what they are doing. We've done a good job of that. We were not great with that in Game 6. But we have another opportunity to do that tomorrow, and that's what we've got to do if we want to win the game.

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