

NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

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Indiana Pacers

Rick Carlisle

Practice Day



Q. A lot of people on social media are comparing the T.J. McConnell role with the J.J. Barea role back in the 2011 championship run. What do you think about that and how important is T.J. McConnell for you guys?

RICK CARLISLE: Very important, and I do see similarities.

Q. A couple games ago, Mark was asked about, have you run out of adjustments yet, and he said no. I'm wondering now, on the brink of a Game 7, have both teams seen pretty much everything the other team has and it's all on the table now for execution, or do you think there's still things up your sleeve?

RICK CARLISLE: Oh, there are more adjustments that can be made, for sure. So we'll see.

Q. We talk a lot about the Game 7 pressure on the players. Do you feel any pressure as a coach to coach any different or make better decisions? How do you approach it, and what kind of an advantage is your experience over Daigneault in a Game 7?

RICK CARLISLE: I love pressure. As you go on in your competitive life in sport, what you learn is that these moments are rare, and trying to duplicate this kind of situation is something that you look to do in everyday life. It's not easy to do that. It's not easy to do that.

So I'm very much looking forward to Game 7. The last time we've had one of these in the Finals, I think was '16. I've seen some things about that. These are special moments certainly for both teams but for our league, for the game, for the worldwide interest in the game. It's a time to celebrate.

Q. Before the series, you talked about how you expected a very exciting series and here we are, three games apiece, a differential of just seven points. Has it gone the way you expected as far as that excitement level, and is it something that you saw that a lot of others perhaps didn't see in this series?

RICK CARLISLE: You never know how it's going to go. I'd be lying if I said this has gone exactly as I expected because each playoff series, each game is a different thing. Each game takes on a different personality, has different characteristics. Different guys step up. Different situations happen, etc.

The truth is that nothing else previous to this matters at all now. We're just down to one game and one opportunity. We're really looking forward to it.

Q. How similar is this group and this playoff run to the one you had with the Mavericks back in 2011, and how much do you use it as a motivation for your group nowadays?

RICK CARLISLE: There are some similarities. Certainly the character level of the players on the team, there are great similarities there. Both of these groups, the '11 Mavericks and the '25 Pacers, just have great people. I see Oklahoma as having a similar-type team.

The Mavericks team was more veteran than we are. We have veterans. But (the Mavericks] had more guys in their 30s who had been in playoff runs and stuff like that. There's a difference there.

When it comes down to it, it's 48 minutes. It's 48 minutes. Once again, we're just very grateful for our fans. We're very grateful for our organization. Our staff is very grateful for the guys we have on our team and the collaborative spirit that we've had all year. And now, it's one game.

Q. There's a lot of talking at the moment of how Obi Toppin developed as a player, especially when it comes to the defensive side. What can you share about the approach to bringing so much more out of him?

RICK CARLISLE: When we acquired him two years ago in the trade with New York, the first thing we talked to him about was the fact that we were thrilled to have him. We saw a lot of special qualities in him as a young player that still had a lot of development to do.



We talked to him about defense and rebounding, that those were two areas where he still has significant upside and that we were going to commit to helping him develop in those two areas.

What we've learned about Obi is he's a great teammate. He is a great worker. He wants to be a part of something that isn't just about him. He has worked extremely hard, and he's improved in both of those areas.

At certain points of the year, he has been one of our better defensive rebounders, and that had been one of his weaknesses.

Look, I'm proud of all of our guys. But him in particular, he has really come a long way.

Q. Chet Holmgren has been somewhat limited in this series. How critical of a piece is that in getting you guys to the point that you are?

RICK CARLISLE: He is a great young player, and he has had a lot of stretches where we have not dealt with him well. Like all their other guys, they have a lot of great players on this team. We have to do everything we can to make it as difficult as possible.

Q. I know this is a tough time for reflection with one more big one to go, but you go so far back in the state of Indiana, and Indianapolis. This is your third stint here. What has this run meant to you, given your long history in the state?

RICK CARLISLE: I haven't been doing a lot of reminiscing about that. When you are part of a playoff run that gets going and you can keep it going, there's a part of you -- and I'm speaking myself personally, you want to avoid thinking about warm, fuzzy things. You've got to really concentrate on process. You've got to keep trying to think of little tiny things that you can do as a coach to help enhance your players' abilities to play their best and things like that.

But I will say that the three games of this series at Gainbridge Fieldhouse have been the loudest that I've ever heard that place. My first stint in Indiana, in the '90s with Larry (Bird), we were in Market Square for two years and that was very loud, too. Then we were in Conseco, at the time in the inaugural year, and made an unexpected run to the Finals that year. That was extremely loud, too. I remember, particularly, Game 3, after we had dropped the first two games to the Lakers.

My second stint as a head coach, we got to the Conference Finals that first year, and the place was

rocking. But I have never heard it as loud as I've heard it this year. So I know that that means it's meant an awful lot to our fan base.

The story of this franchise is interesting because the franchise was almost lost at one point. There was a telethon to bring it back to life. They had to raise a certain amount of money and sell a certain number of tickets so that the bank wouldn't foreclose on the franchise. Nancy and Slick Leonard had a lot to do with that. Then the Simons came in and purchased the team. From there, it's been 40, 41, maybe it's going on 42 years now, I don't know.

It's a long, storied journey. I know all this right now means a lot to our fans. We've just got to focus on one game.

Q. A few years ago you installed an offense that relied heavily on passing, heavy passing. Whether it's causal or not, the scoring was spread out as well. To what extent was that decision made philosophically by you, given the material you had and the players you had, and to what extent did you think, it's going to be very hard for the best defense in basketball to cover all these guys?

RICK CARLISLE: I'm not exactly sure what time frame you're talking about or what year or whatever. Our roster is built in a way where we need balance.

When we traded for Tyrese, it was pretty clear that we needed to play with tempo. Kevin Pritchard and Chad Buchanan have built a roster with guys that can run and defend around him.

Today's game, roster construction seems to be changing. A lot of the best rosters now are built on balance, and that's certainly what we're trying to do. I think that's what Oklahoma is doing, too.

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