

# NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Sunday, June 22, 2025

Oklahoma City Thunder

Alex Caruso

Game 7: Postgame



**70 people in the gym when you won your first one. How much better does this feel?**

ALEX CARUSO: Probably like 150. Yeah, no, I got a real one now. Now no one can say anything [laughter].

**Q. It seems to me like you were the hybrid player, small enough to hang with guards defensively but aggressive enough to attack the passing lanes, offensive side. Why do you think that worked so well in this system with you and Mark?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I think just through my career, I figured out that I can do stuff that's not necessarily sexy or not necessarily the mainstream offensive skill set or even defensive skill set that people recognize.

I kind of just leaned into it. I kind of practiced being great at the stuff that nobody else does, carving a role for myself in the league. I think through the years, I've just kind of perfected that stuff.

**Q. When Isaiah was in here, he revealed that there was some difficulty getting the corks out of the bottles, that you had to do some educating.**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah [smiling].

**Q. Any more of a better indicator of how young a team this is?**

ALEX CARUSO: We didn't do it all at the same time until the third try. I tried my best when we got in there. All right, let's get a head count, make sure everyone is here before we do the first one. Through the learning experience of taking the foil off, undoing the metal, having the cork ready, there's three or four guys that popped their corks. Then it happened again. We're like, all right, we went through the process a couple times, and eventually we got everybody on the same page.

It was a good first try. We'll get some rest, reset, try to go again next year and see if we can do it again. We'll be better. We'll be better next year.

**Q. A championship is a championship, but there were**

Yeah, I think just because of the way the team is constructed now versus the team I had in 2020, like, it was much harder with this team just because of the experience, right? Everybody talked about you need experience to win a championship and you need this, that and the other.

I said multiple times through the postseason with this team, good basketball is good basketball, winning basketball is winning basketball. The best team can win, no matter what happens if you go out there and execute and do the stuff you need to do to win the game.

I think through the Playoffs, this team grew up and learned on the fly, which most teams have to learn through losses and learn through defeat. I think this team learned through success.

It's a unique capability to be able to do that for 21 to 27-year-old kids. For me, I've seen greats do it, so I knew the way, I knew the mindset. But to see these guys do it, man, it's really cool to see it in person. I'm so happy for the guys to be able to figure it out and to be able to get this done.

**Q. You mentioned being part of one of these before with a veteran team. This is a much younger team.**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, slightly.

**Q. It's still in the moment, but is it tempting to think of how much more could be ahead of this team, how much more success?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, at this moment right now, I'm not thinking about much. I'm thinking about succeeding and winning and celebrating with my brothers.

Yeah, I mean, you're not guaranteed anything in the league. I think that's the biggest thing that happens year to year that people forget about. Any moment your team can

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change with a trade, with an injury, with something that's out of your control.

To be able to get to the pinnacle of this sport and win it is nothing short of extraordinary. To think that you can just walk in and do it every single year is a little bit naïve.

Rest assured, we'll show up day one next year ready to get better and ready to chase this again.

**Q. When you won, LeBron was the leader of the team and the NBA at that point. Talk about Shai and his leadership of this team, his potential of being someone like a LeBron James?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, comparing to LeBron is a crazy start just because LeBron was anointed at 18 years old, surpassed everything that has ever been put in front of him.

But as far as face of the league, best player on best team, he's got that capability. Clearly the year he's had, MVP, Western Conference Finals MVP, Finals MVP, champion. I don't think anyone will question his ability. I think the thing that sets him apart is he'll probably be hungry for more. He probably won't be satisfied with winning this one time. He'll want to be better. He'll want to see how he can tweak and maneuver his game to a better fit and take advantage of the way people guard him. That's just the special ability that he has mentally to be competitive and want to be great.

**Q. Mark might be one of the most even-keeled people on the planet.**

ALEX CARUSO: Did he smile tonight when he came to talk to you all?

**Q. He hasn't come in yet. Did you see him crack at all in all of this or did he maintain? What does that say about his imprint on this team?**

ALEX CARUSO: No, he won Coach of the Year last year, I think. Arguably could have been again this year. They don't give that back-to-back to coaches. That's not a thing.

Man, his ability to collaborate with his assistants, then come together and have a clear, concise message for us is second to none. He does a great job of pushing buttons when he needs to push buttons. He does a great job of figuring out solutions to problems. Then he does a great job of holding people accountable, which is a huge thing in the NBA.

We talked about Shai's year, MVP, Finals MVP, all that

stuff. He told him how he needed to play better after Game 6. He was really sticky, he needed to move the ball. Shai had, what, 12, 13 assists, probably a season high for him, on top of doing all the stuff he normally does.

I think that's one of the unique things that Mark brings to the coaching aspect, is just his ability to not really care about quota, what the status quo is. He's going to coach how he knows to coach. It's the same way when he coached me when I was on the G League nine years ago. It's probably the reason he's had the success that he's had because he's true to himself.

**Q. You played a pretty good defensive first half. You start the second half, Indiana goes four and a half minutes without scoring.**

ALEX CARUSO: Start the third?

**Q. Yes, third quarter, yeah. What did you do to start the second half that turned up the defensive pressure?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, the game just came down to winning coverages, then winning closeouts. In the beginning of the game, we did a really good job of closing out to their guys, taking shots, but also winning drives. Got a little loose late first, early second.

To start the third, we kind of knew what it was. We held them to 48, Nembhard hit like a 30-foot stepback at the half. You can't be too mad or too upset about defensive intensity and execution in the first half. We knew it was probably going to be more offensive stuff that was going to open the game up for us.

Even saying that, like, our defensive mindset and just execution start of the third, then start of the fourth, they were at 68 for a long time, which gave us that separation, which we've talked about in this series, that they're going to make runs, they're a good team, they don't give up, they play with heart. They made a run. But we had the score 20 instead of 10. It wasn't a one or two-point game, but a 10 or 12-point game. I think that's what gave us the window to win the game.

**Q. We talked to you a lot about your veteran leadership on this team. As a veteran, what have you learned from the young guys, new music, dance moves?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, no, I'm still pretty in tune with the music. They make TikToks and I've abstained from that. I might get roped into one of those in the coming days because of happenstance.



I talked about it up on the stage after the game, this group has a joy about them, they have a unique maturity that comes with a lack of experience that's rare. I think just being able to show up, everybody accepts everybody for who they are, able to be themselves, really impact the game and impact the team with who they are naturally, it goes a long way. I think it really helped us through the year and obviously through the Playoffs.

**Q. A lot was talked about the full circle moment playing for the G League for the Thunder, now you're a champion for the team. How much more special does that feel for you?**

ALEX CARUSO: Yeah, I mean, this isn't something that I take for granted. Like, multiple times after we won, I'm bouncing, I'm jumping up and down with joy. Winning a championship is so hard at any level, especially at the NBA level, because it takes so much. It takes so many different people doing their jobs at a high level.

I'm a very present person, so it's hard sometimes to understand and think back to, man, I was in the G League, I wasn't even in the NBA, I had to go to Summer League and summer elite camps, had to go to Portsmouth, all these things just to get an invitation to an NBA team. Then I had more work to do. Then to work for a second contract. Then I had to work to get to a team like this to be a capable winner, a champion winner.

It's something that, like I said, I don't take for granted. Immense pride. It's something that I'll celebrate with my family and my fiancée, my close friends, my agent, people that have been with me through the journey, people that have seen me from the highest of highs and lowest of lows, people that have supported me from the start.

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