

# NBA Finals: Thunder vs. Pacers

Sunday, June 22, 2025

Oklahoma City Thunder

Mark Daigneault

Game 7: Postgame

Oklahoma City Thunder 103, Indiana Pacers 91

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I want to start by congratulating Indiana on a great run and a great season. I have such respect for the way they play, the way they're coached. Prayers to Haliburton obviously. That was incredibly unfortunate.

I just gained so much respect for them. In the intimacy of a playoff series, you really get to know your opponent. They are an absolute handful. Gave us all we could handle. I just wanted to congratulate them.

I also want to take time to congratulate the city, Mr. Bennett, Sam, the rest of our organization. I'm sure we'll talk about the players. A group of people that really deserve this. I'm humbled that I get to be a part of it. A huge congratulations to all of them.

**Q. After you did your on-stage interview, you migrated to the back and stood and watched things happen. What was going through your mind?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I'm just so happy for the guys. I mean, this is an uncommon team. This is a great team. All the boxes that this team checked this season, it's an historic team.

But there's no guarantee you end it the way that we did. I just wanted it so bad for them. I was just so thrilled that we were able to get that done and they get to experience this because they deserve it. The way they approach it, the professionalism, competitiveness, team-first nature, like I said, I wanted it so bad for them.

**Q. When you guys were getting presented with the trophy, Shai called Dub a once-in-a-lifetime player. What makes him so special?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: He's got a lot of runway still. He's a young player. He's in his third season. Just the versatility, all the boxes he checks. He's good at everything. There's



nothing he can't do on a basketball court. The cumulative effect of that is he impacts every game. He's a player that is still growing and improving. I'm just so impressed by him and what he can do on the court.

**Q. Whenever you made the hockey line changes at the end, you had an embrace with Alex Caruso. Have you thought about your journey with him, where you started in the G League?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: That was a time warp, that moment. Dort, he was out here guarding 50 feet when it was COVID and there were no fans in the stands, we're winning 20 games. Shai and AC, Dub. Just the history we all have together and the work that we've put in together. We've hung in there together. We've stayed together, the whole team. Yeah, I can't describe it. It was a special moment for me.

**Q. You had one of the quickest turnarounds in league history. What is it about the character of the organization, of the team, that allowed you to make such a leap so quickly?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I've called the guys uncommon many times, but I really believe that. Just the way they operate, the way they behave, the way they compete is uncommon in professional sports. It just is.

Then I also think the organization has been at it for a long time, before this build. Mr. Bennett has been here from the jump. Sam has been here from the jump. Those two guys have built a first-class organization. The vision for that and the work that has gone into that really put the wind at our back when it was time to start from scratch really. That was a huge thing.

As young as the team was and as new as everything was, there were so many people, from Saint to Donnie Strack, to Ayana, Matt Tumbleson, Sam, his group. The players were young, but the process and the systems and the environments were seasoned. That gave us a huge lift.

You add the players that we had to that, that's how I think the speed happened. And good fortune. We got lucky in some ways.

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**Q. You've had big third quarters before. What was your conversation at halftime like? Defensively you came out really aggressive.**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I mean, you watch any Game 7 of a Finals, any Game 7 period, but Game 7 of the Finals, it's a different feeling, a different level of pressure. The gravity of the game is overwhelming for everybody participating.

I thought in the first half you could see that. I think certainly with us, but with both teams. The whole run I've just tried to help the guys be who they are. That's all we needed to do, just be who we were. I thought the tone at the beginning of the second half with the offensive rebounds, it set a great tone. Then the offense started to come around. The defense sustained. Obviously that was a huge, huge run for us.

**Q. I'm going to take a risk and ask you about your least favorite topic, which is yourself. A lot of people have coached this game, only 8% of them have won a championship. What will this mean to you as far as your journey and the fact that you probably proved a lot of people right and wrong along the way?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I'm incredibly grateful. Grateful to Sam and Mr. Bennett for the opportunity. Grateful for the players. I just feel such a sense of responsibility when you have a team like this. Everyone says the team is hard to coach, and usually that has a negative connotation. When you have a team that is this talented, professional, competitive, this willing to sacrifice, that's the ultimate pressure on a coach because you want to serve that. They deserve that.

That's what gives me the most pride right now, is that I feel like I was able to do that for them because they deserved all of this. That's really what I'm feeling right now.

**Q. How did you see the whole series, the level of basketball that you played, that Indiana played?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: I think it was great for the league and the product for two small-market teams that have never won a championship to have the type of series that we did. It was hard to appreciate that because it was just so hard in the moment.

One thing I learned is, it's hard to get to your ceiling as a team in the Playoffs when you're playing great teams over and over again. It's really about how high your floor is. I thought that was the mark of our team. You have to really grind it out. It's an endurance race. You have to be able to

win in the mud. You have to be able to win ugly, have to be able to gut it out. That's what we did. The team did an unbelievable job of that.

**Q. Be where your feet are, can you describe where your feet are, how you're feeling right now?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yeah, I think the team did a great job of that. We lost a tough game in Game 6. We went there to win. We really felt good about that game, and we did not perform well. You're coming into Game 7, anything can happen.

I thought the team did a great job of just staying present in the game. We're down one at halftime. The game was not easy for either team. I just thought the guys did an unbelievable job of rooting into the moment, trying to win the next possession, just let the game unfold the way it does. The guys have done a great job of that all year. They did a great job of it tonight.

**Q. Over the course of your tenure you talked about being 0-0. After winning a championship, can you acknowledge that you're 1-0?**

MARK DAIGNEAULT: Yes, I mean, you got to have those themes. This team responds well to those things. If you put the right thing in front of them, they really take to it. I think that's the right thing, the right way to approach competition.

But these guys bring it to life with the way they play. You can talk about it all you want, but it comes down to how you perform. These guys perform like competitive monsters.

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