

NBA Finals: Knicks vs. Spurs

Tuesday, June 9, 2026

San Antonio Spurs

Coach Mitch Johnson

Practice Day



Q. How comfortable are you with how much you guys have been in rotation in this series and sort of the chase between their ball movement and your rotations, whether that can sustain over a long series?

MITCH JOHNSON: It's going to have to. They move the ball. I think there's things we can be better at. I think we've had some really good moments of being connected in those rotations and taking certain things away, forcing the ball to certain spots or individuals in certain situations.

We've forced them to take a lot of shots at the end of clock. They've made a lot of those shots. There's some give and take there. I think we've shown that we can be impactful when we're connected and doing it the right way.

They've shown they do a great job moving the ball and making the basketball find the open man. I think it will be a little bit of tug-of-war until this thing's over.

Q. Yesterday Victor talked about how he went to the park and did some drawing on his off day. How do you like players getting out of the environment of the churn of the Finals? How do you feel like that helped yesterday?

MITCH JOHNSON: I don't have any idea if it helped. I don't really get into what they do on their off time in terms of how that is associated with their performance on the court.

I think everybody's different. Some people like to do different things or spend their extracurricular time differently. We try to value time in terms of not taking too much of it, being mindful when we ask them of their time.

In terms of how they spend their own time, that's up to them. Hopefully they are trying to find ways to do it, because we are in a fishbowl in terms of the visibility and whatnot. If he went to the park, and that was something to help him clear his mind, be a positive for him, that's great.

Q. You were talking earlier in this series about how teams used to play smaller on Vic earlier in his career. How would you describe how he's able to kind of mentally dissect what teams are doing to him in games and make those adjustments on the fly?

MITCH JOHNSON: I think a player of his caliber sees so many coverages, groupings, matchups, take this away, force them to do that. Over time I believe there just becomes a comfortability, and that leads to familiarity, then even confidence, of the pictures that they're seeing. That takes a lot of time. That's pattern recognition. In this pattern recognition, there's processing, and then at the highest level there's manipulation and dictating by the greats that have done it over the years.

I think he's just on that same pathway in terms of he's now had three-plus years of seeing these different things, while his body's evolving and maturing and growing, while his game is evolving, growing and maturing, while his mind is evolving, maturing and growing.

It is an organic path. I'm talking about the greats, the best players in this league. Again, that's from my perspective. I don't have the experience in it. I do think there becomes a certain level of processing and being able to take advantage of something.

You can't take away everything, we know that as a defense, right? That's the highest level of understanding, whether it's for yourself, and then that's when you involve your teammates and being able to take advantage of every situation. I think he's made a lot of growth in that, and we're seeing that at the highest level.

Q. With a team as young as yours, it wouldn't have been crazy if they let go of the rope in Game 3. What has your sense been of their belief? After Game 1, Vic said he's not worried in the slightest. After Game 2, he's encouraging his teammates. Seems like the belief didn't waver. How have you tried to impact that?

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, we've played over a hundred games now. What I've seen is we knew that the belief was going to be there. That doesn't mean you're going to win or lose a game just because you believe or

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not. There's a lot of things that go into it.

But we've just been honest all year. So every time we keep getting asked about do we believe, are we confident, can we do this, we do. That doesn't mean we always play our best. Doesn't mean that we don't make mistakes. Doesn't mean we don't lose games.

We believe in what we put into this deal and each other and how we go about and how we operate and how we're going to respond. That's been through adversity and success throughout the season.

I understand the discourse around it, but that's not an age thing or an experience thing, that's a makeup and a personality thing.

Q. You often talk about spacing as it relates to the playmaking, shots created from passing. In terms of shot quality, how have you seen the types of looks you get when you have Dev and Jules on the floor as opposed to if you have just Dev or Jules, and are there any similarities?

MITCH JOHNSON: Those guys obviously provide, especially you talk about the guys that played substantial minutes, the highest shooting performance over time and consistency. Those guys bring great space to Victor, who draws gravity in his own way. The three playmakers that have the ball in their hands a lot in terms of De'Aaron, Dylan, and Steph.

They're great fits with those guys. Every lineup a little bit is a puzzle, right? You want some more shooting, but now you need some more rebounding. Well, then what about the defense, the ball handling, the speed, the matchups? What about what the game is calling for? Are you in the bonus or are they in the bonus?

Those guys have been really, really good pieces. I think more than their shooting, it's both their growth in everything but the shooting. A lot of guys in this league that can make shots. Sometimes you hear commentators, because they're the ones typically talking about the game, we can't play this person anymore because they're attacking them defensively. Can't play this person anymore because he's a liability in this regard.

Those guys being winning players, team players, in terms of defense, rebounding, being able to play off closeouts, understanding how to screen to get their teammates advantages, that's been a huge part of why they're so valuable to winning, along with the shooting piece.

Q. On the last round when the Knicks came back

against Cleveland in Game 1, it was clear the Cavaliers never got over that. Game 1 you weren't up by quite as much, but it seemed like a gut-punch kind of loss. I know you say I know my team. That seems like a situation that no one faces. It's your first Finals game. You don't say anything different to say I know you guys have shown me before, but you haven't shown me quite this yet?

MITCH JOHNSON: No, we acknowledge this is the Finals. We're not blowing smoke or trying to create a facade that everything's equal or not a big deal.

We acknowledge where we're at. We know what we're walking out of. We believe what we're capable and what we're walking into.

Yeah, the added circumstances, attention, noise, external, whatever you want to describe it as, is understandably real. We believe it doesn't have an effect on us winning or losing a basketball game.

Tomorrow is going to be a hostile environment on the road against a competitive, great basketball team. We have to play to a level of execution standard and to our style of play to give ourselves the best chance to win.

There's a lot of stuff that can be discussed. In our perspective, it really has no say-so in who is probably going to end up winning the game.

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