

NBA Finals: Knicks vs. Spurs

Wednesday, June 10, 2026

San Antonio Spurs

Coach Mitch Johnson

Game 4: Pregame

Q. What can you tell us about the work of Keldon Johnson in Game 3?

MITCH JOHNSON: I thought he played with really good energy. I thought he tried to rebound himself into the game and play good team defense. That's what we need from him.

We know he can score the basketball. That will come with just minutes and opportunity. But his ability to rebound for us on both ends and be a strong team defender is what we need him to do.

Q. I was wondering, can you talk about Stephon, his evolution this year as far as decision-making, finding his rhythm?

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, he's found his rhythm because we've asked him to do every single thing that a player can be asked since he's been drafted. I know that goes back two years, not just this year.

He started. He's been brought off the bench. Played on the ball, off the ball. He's guarded primary ball creators. He's guarded bigger wings and even some 'bigger players' or big guys. He's fearless. He's relentless.

He probably doesn't get enough credit for his processing. That's what allows him to do so much for us. He's in the middle of almost every single play, like Victor. Victor for good reason gets discussed and a lot of discussion regarding that. But Steph is in just as many of the plays in terms of influencing them.

He's 21 years old. He's in his second year. What he's doing in the Finals, that's rare air. It's really, really elite company in what he's doing. I think it gets overshadowed, and I talk about it all the time, just because it's now starting to become you expect him to do it.

Q. On Stephon, who did you get advice from on coaching him? Did you call Coach Hurley, his high



school coach, AAU, his dad? How tough can you be with him?

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, our scouting department, front office, do a great job in terms of preparing us when we acquire a player. A lot of times I think as coaches we ignorantly get a player and then it's like their book starts. There's so much history that you can learn about a player and a person before they get to you.

When you look back at his time, whether being coached by Coach Hurley, whether it's how he's raised in his household by his mother and father, whether it's him playing off the ball and sacrificing maybe some of the on-the-ball opportunities that he's more than capable of at Connecticut, to join a national championship team to then win another national championship, a McDonald's All-American in high school that played with the basketball.

When you start peeling back the layers, the toughness is there, the discipline and structure is there, understanding the value of a role is there, and it's shown itself in so many different ways, and then so once you get that young man, drafted him, as a player and a person, you get to build your own rapport with them. It is really helpful to understand what people and players go through before they get to you. If you take the time to understand that and them, I do think it sets you up to have a successful on-boarding process and kind of rhythm as you get to know them early on.

I give a lot of credit to Brian Wright and his staff for that.

Q. Third Castle question in a row. Steve Nash used to always say he has a lot of assists, which means he will also have a lot of turnovers sometimes. How do you learn to live with the occasional games where he gets in foul trouble?

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, as we've seen as a rookie last year when there was times where we just wanted him to get on-the-job training or we've seen this year in the Playoffs where we're not going to minimize his role or the volume of him being at the center of everything we have.

It's just learning. That's a lot of balancing to do that. Cause he also scores. So there's that delicate tightrope of

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be aggressive for yourself, for your teammate. Got to get Victor going. Don't forget about your shooters. Move the ball side to side. You don't have to make the home run play.

I think it's just trying to keep him as fearless and relentless as he is and as confident as he always is, while also just kind of partnering with him of kind of that evolution of the pattern recognition of over time, as you see that, they're playing you for this. When they do that, this may open up that.

Again, he doesn't make a lot of repeatable mistakes. Yeah, he's just doing a heck of a job at so many different things.

Q. We know about Wemby, the training stuff he does to be focused. Is he sharing with the other ones to be so much in that moment even though you actually see what's going on around you?

MITCH JOHNSON: I think what's been fun to observe from this group is there are so many parallels because the age group that a lot of them are in that same range. This experience as a group is a first. The experience for a lot of the individuals at this level is a first.

I think they share a lot with each other. I also think they are experiencing with each other. I just think when you see that interaction between them, whether that's on the court, during the heat of the game, or off the court in the locker room or when they're just with each other off the court, you see that just organic interaction. They're friends, teammates, they care about each other. They're also very competitive. Don't take each other too seriously.

I think it's suited them well for going through this experience.

Q. The Knicks have kind of dominated the second quarters in this series. A lot of these runs have come with actually Brunson on the bench and Wemby on the floor. Have you thought about changing your substitution patterns at all? Generally, how do you weigh changing something that maybe is not working versus sticking with what's gotten you this far?

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, it's kind of the age-old question that is always going to be there, to change, then you start changing too much, chasing your tail, then what do you need to do better.

Yeah, it's just they've played well during that stretch. We'd like to be better in every quarter. We have played some different sub patterns in that quarter and haven't found

anything up to now that has worked.

We started the quarter well sometimes. Haven't finished it well. Vice versa. Yeah, you just kind of keep taking the feedback from previous games and push yourself to be better. My job is to help the guys put them in environments and situations to be better. Hopefully we'll have a better second quarter tonight.

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