

NBA Western Conference Finals: Lakers vs. Nuggets

Thursday, May 18, 2023

Michael Malone

Denver Nuggets

Game 2: Pregame

Q. You always say it but obviously we all know what he [Nikola Jokic] does to elevate the rest of the guys when he's passing, so do you have a preference, or I know usually just defer to Nikola, but do you have a preference on how he approaches that?

MICHAEL MALONE: The thing you love about Nikola is he's going to read the game. Earlier in the game they were double-teaming him, so he found the open man. And when they played him one-on-one, he attacked the basket. And that's the thing I probably admire about him most, he never goes into a game or a possession with a premeditated notion of this is what I'm doing because he's going to read how the defense is guarding him and us.

But with that being said, you know, when Nikola is being aggressive and has that mindset, it elevates his game but more importantly the team's game and the guys around him follow suit.

Q. Were you able to sneak into the graduation last night with your daughter?

MICHAEL MALONE: Yeah. It was at Red Rocks, three hours I'll never be back but it was great to be there and see my daughter walk across the stage. I'm probably in the minority, I'm not a huge fan of graduations. I think you're supposed to graduate high school. But I do love my daughter, Caitlin, very proud of her. But it started raining, sitting there at Red Rocks, it's raining and I'm saying, we're playing the Lakers tomorrow.

But it's all good. Happy graduation, Caitlin.

Q. Speaking of reading the game, LeBron started to seek out Jamal on those screens and switches. If you anticipate that happening today, is there any different way you'd like to play that? Would you like to not give up a switch so easily because it could get Jamal in foul trouble or do you have a different outlook on that?

MICHAEL MALONE: We have to keep Jamal out of foul



trouble. He's obviously of tremendous importance to our team and we are much better when he is on the floor and not on the bench in foul trouble.

So, they run a ton of pick-and-rolls. I mean, drag screens, high pick-and-rolls, step-ups, whatever it may be. So, throughout the course of 48 minutes, we have to do a better job of giving them different looks while protecting our players and that's what we aim to do tonight.

Q. A lot has been made of the Rui Hachimura adjustment the Lakers have built. It reminds of the way teams used to defend Giannis -- building a wall. But how do you take advantage in that situation when teams are going to overload the paint as often as they are?

MICHAEL MALONE: Once again, we have seen this before and Nikola is going to figure it out. We are going to figure it out. It's the first time I've ever been in a series up 1-0 and the series is over in everybody's eyes because they put Rui on Nikola Jokic for six possessions. So, let's see how it plays out tonight.

Q. On that adjustment, does it hurt to make an adjustment like that and it not work or do you have that adjustment at your disposal, do you feel like philosophically you should make it as soon as possible?

MICHAEL MALONE: Well, I'm not much of a philosopher, so I think any coach, you're going to do whatever you have to do to win a game. So, if it's going to it in Game 1 of a series and they feel they have found something, kudos to them. Same thing for us. We'll do things differently tonight than we did in Game 1. It's a constant analyzing what were the areas that we struggled in and what we have to do better at and addressing those.

As I mentioned yesterday, for us, fortunately, to address those after a win, and have 25 clips where you can show defensively, like this is not what we were supposed to do, and B, this is what we are going to try to do tomorrow night. And so that's the nature of adjustments in a series.

But for me, sometimes you don't want to hold onto something. If you feel it's going to help you, throw it out there and see if it's going to work.



Q. Is Jamal fully recovered from the sickness he was dealing with?

MICHAEL MALONE: I wouldn't say fully. Talking to him this morning, I think he's still battling something. I think whatever's gone through our team is still lingering a little bit. But he's definitely in a better place but not one hundred percent.

Q. Obviously best regular season record in the West and two-time MVP and up for his third MVP, but in many ways the team flew under the radar in some senses. What do you make of that?

MICHAEL MALONE: I don't make much of it. I've been here eight years now. So, I guess maybe you kind of grow accustomed to it. There are people who are still kind of being introduced to who Nikola Jokic is and the guy just put on a 34, 21 and 14 performance and oh, by the way, he's averaging a triple-double in the playoffs.

It is what it is. We don't want to spend much time or energy worrying about that. We have much bigger things to worry about, like trying to beat a really talented L.A. Laker team, who is going to come in here and give us everything they can to try to steal a game on our home court, and that's where our focus is.

Q. What's going to be the biggest key to replicating what you guys are able to do in the first quarter of Game 1 tonight?

MICHAEL MALONE: Defense. If you look at the box score, last game, that was the only quarter we played defense. I think it was 25 points for them and they only shot 40 percent, and the rebounding, we dominated the glass. That's one of the reasons they are talking about starting much bigger tonight because I think at one point early in that game the rebound margin was 22-3, and we were getting second and third opportunities.

If we can replicate anything it's going to be that defense that we started Game 1 with because that also allows us to get out and run and attack, and that's when we are at our best.

Q. There is a lot of discussion about adjustments and what each team is going to do. As much as you can, what are those discussions like with your coaching staff, light-hearted? Intense? What is the characterization of them?

MICHAEL MALONE: We started having those conversations during the game in Game 1. Their size and

physicality was hurting all the switching that we were doing. So those conversations during games can be somewhat animated because it's in the moment.

Then we always come back, we all watch the film after the game and then we get together early the next morning and we take our time going through the film and seeing, okay, what really hurt us, how did they hurt us and what can we do to fix that and give them a different look. For us, it's more of a very detailed and calculated discussion, and making sure that once we meet with our team and present that argument, that it's clear and concise.

So now that team can go out there and execute that game plan without confusion or thinking but doing and being aggressive and doing that game plan, and hopefully we'll have some carryover and be better in those areas tonight.

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