

# NBA Western Conference Finals: Lakers vs. Nuggets

Thursday, May 18, 2023

## Darvin Ham

Los Angeles Lakers

Game 2: Postgame

Nuggets 108, Lakers 103

**Q. Not a typical night efficiency-wise from LeBron and AD. Just wondering if you saw anything from some of the shots they were missing and how that built as the second half went on?**

DARVIN HAM: Yeah, we missed some pretty good looks. First of all, respect to them, they did what they were supposed to do, take care of their home floor, held serve. Now it's on us to fill our cups back up and go do what we need to do on our home floor, starting with Game 3. That's all we need to be concerned about is Game 3.

In terms of the efficiency, I mean we were aggressive. Came out a whole lot better than we did in Game 1. Again, the increments in which we're improving as this series goes on, albeit it's only been two games, we did a lot of good things out there tonight. We had some lulls that they were able to take advantage of. Did a great job defensively in that first half. Majority of third, and then kind of got out of rhythm offensively and they caught fire, and that combination usually leads to your demise.

But proud of our guys. They bounced back. We addressed a lot of the things that we said we were going to try to do better. Still got to be better in transition D. But overall the energy was there, the effort was there, the urgency was there, we just caught a bad stretch.

**Q. You mentioned the shooting, Denver was 7-for-25 from three but getting good looks in the first three quarters. They hit those five straight. What was the philosophy in trying to deal with the ball screens there and still think about Jokic?**

DARVIN HAM: Can't relax off the ball. They're one of the better off-ball offensive teams in the league. And you cannot relax. They set those back screens and they're slipping out and Jokic is giving a hand back to Green or whoever, Gordon, we just can't relax off the ball. They draw a lot of attention in the half court and then they had



some other guys step up as well in terms of Michael Porter Jr, Bruce Brown.

It's just got to be, again, tighten the screws, continue to extract what we can from these games to help us be in a position to take care of business once we get home in Game 3.

**Q. Two-part question: One, you changed the starting group, put Vando in for Dennis. I guess that's the normal starting group but how did you decide on that? And then changing the matchups down the stretch where you put LeBron on Jokic, Rui on Jamal so you could switch there, two-man action, just that decision as well?**

DARVIN HAM: Yeah, I mean, just starting Vando just, inserting some energy and some size and athleticism into the lineup. And then as you mentioned, that was our starting lineup for the remainder of the regular season. The only time it wasn't our starting lineup was Game 6 against Golden State, and Game 1 here.

So, getting them back out there, allowing him to put a bigger body on Murray, I thought it was effective.

As far as just running different guys at Jokic, we're going to have to guard him by committee. AD does the best job that he can possibly do in a one-on-one, but, again, even when AD is guarding him straight up, our guys off the ball have to have their antennas up, be in a position to help and then close out effectively, not being undisciplined with their closeouts.

But again, Joker is one of those guys. You got to change matchups. You got to change coverages and I won't get into any details about what we plan to do going forward, but that's just the way it is. In general terms, he's going to make you work, he's going to make you go in your bag of tricks to try to slow him down.

**Q. With LeBron spending so many possessions guarding Jokic, do you think that had anything to do with his shot selection in the fourth quarter, taking threes early on in the quarter versus driving?**

DARVIN HAM: I just thought he was trying to make a play for his teammates. He was open, they're playing off of him.



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He's a highly capable three-point shooter, he let it fly. With our team overall just wanting us to continuously play downhill. That's something I really, really want to harp on. I think we went from 16 to 10 free throws in the second half. Like, we have to continuously play with aggression. Again, like I always say, love and live in the paint.

That allows some of these three-point attempts to be that much more open and that much more in rhythm.

**Q. Along those lines, do you think fatigue factored at all into your team's lack of a downhill sort of attack in the fourth?**

DARVIN HAM: I mean, they do a great job shifting on their side. They have a bunch of athletes. Just have to make quick plays. Have to be quick decisions. Whenever you probe too long or you hold the ball too long, it strengthens their defense. They have long athletic wings and obviously Joker is long. Green, Gordon, those guys are super duper athletic. Hell, MPJ, he's 6-11. So, we have to just play offense with a pace, both in the full court and in the half court.

**Q. This team has talked a lot about basketball IQ particularly after the trade deadline but two mistakes stand out: There was LeBron in transition kind of going for a reverse and fumbling the ball, pretty uncharacteristically and Dennis' three-point attempt at the end of the third that got blocked and triggered. Do those plays kind of signify like a need for this team to tighten up maybe a little bit mentally?**

DARVIN HAM: You can go through the course of a basketball game and you have unfortunate plays that happen. I'm sure they can pick out some from their side. So, it was just -- you have to just have things happen during the course of an NBA game, especially a hotly contested one such as the Western Conference Finals, in particular these two teams.

So you just got to have a short memory in terms of the mistake happens or a miscue or something like that, you got to move on. We've been preaching that since day one, have a next-play mentality. Even if you make a shot, you can't stand there and taking a picture with your follow-through. You have to sprint back and get ready to play the next possession on defense.

So I just chalk it up that I don't see that as being a reflection of our IQ. It's just unfortunate circumstance on those couple of plays.

**Q. What did you see in the middle of that fourth quarter when they were hitting the threes? Were you**

**guys relaxing, what was going on that you saw there?**

DARVIN HAM: I mean, we had a situation where we were kind of crossmatched and again they're the best offense in the league. So it's like they're going to put pressure on you to guard them, ball in hand or off the ball. And again, we'll go back and look at our off-ball defense. You start out, you are shifted against the Joker, you are shifted off of Murray, you are trying to take away their back doors, but they also have the capability to sprint uphill to get behind the three-point lane and launch.

So you have to be ready to guard a little bit of everything. That's what happens when you are dealing with a championship-caliber ballclub. It's like you got to -- it's no one thing that you are going to be able to take away and it's going to shut them down. There are multiple ways to beat you, multiple actions, multiple players that can just get hot as we just saw.

So our thing is to not get disappointed, not get discouraged. Just compete, continue to compete at a high level and if they make a shot highly contested, then we have to live with it and go back and try to do the same.

**Q. Two of your role players, Austin and Rui, seemed to have really good games for you. What did you make of how they played for you guys?**

DARVIN HAM: Just told them to come out and be assertive, be aggressive. Don't think twice. When we play with pace and make quick decisions, we're a damn good ball club offensively. It's going to be times we have to slow down and try to punch it into the paint, but for the most part when the ball is moving, changing hands I just think we put ourselves in a good position to win. I mean, we had five players in double figures, so that's a telltale sign, 26 assists, we can get that up a little bit higher, but that's not bad either. Only made eight threes.

So again we just have to continue to chip at the rock, try to do a better job of taking care of the ball in certain moments and continuously get better.

**Q. You guys haven't lost two in a row, I don't think, since maybe mid-March. You have taken control of every series by stealing one on the road. What's the psyche of the team right now, just in the immediate aftermath?**

DARVIN HAM: Well, they're like us, they're undefeated at home. We knew it was going to be a challenge. A hard, hard one at that. And we said it before we even played one game, we got to buckle in and buckle up, buckle down and buckle up because we planned for this to be along

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series.

So again, hat's off to them, they held serve on their home floor, and the more higher the levels you get to, you're going to face much, much tougher teams. No disrespect to Memphis or Golden State, but this team has been at the top of the food chain for a reason, not just this year but the last few years. So, we definitely got our work cut out for us but we're going to get better from this, as we always do, and we'll bounce back on our home floor.

**Q. What happened to LeBron toward the end of the game and then is there any reason for concern for him physically going into the next game?**

DARVIN HAM: Can't really speak on it right now. He's being evaluated. So we'll see. It will be hard to keep him out of this mix though.

**Q. After the Game 1 loss you were relatively upbeat, in fact, your last words were, "We'll be all right. Trust me." After tonight, still same optimism?**

DARVIN HAM: Yeah, it's the same thing. I've been in a lot of these wars, man, both as a player and a coach and not going to get discouraged, you know what I mean? You just got to -- again, it's, they took care of business on their home floor. We have to go do the same. But it doesn't matter where you win, because if we had won one here, they would be coming trying to get Game 3. So we just got to be prepared to do the same as they just did and protect our home court.

**Q. Wanted to ask you about the going for offensive rebounds versus getting back in transition. What the balance is there for guys like Vando or AD with how much Denver can hurt you going up and down the court.**

DARVIN HAM: Yeah, I mean, we have a rule, like if you're in a certain space on a floor on the weak side, then you have permission to crash as hard as you can. But if you're up top, above the break, I mean, you got to sprint back on shot, not when the ball hits the rim, not when it lands or if someone catches it, as soon as you see your teammate, the ball leave his hands, you got to be back.

So that's one of the things that we'll try to be better at come Game 3.

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