

# NBA Western Conference Finals: Lakers vs. Nuggets

Thursday, May 18, 2023

## Michael Malone

Denver Nuggets

Game 2: Postgame

Nuggets 108, Lakers 103

### Q. Question about Jamal Murray.

MICHAEL MALONE: You want [Jamal Murray] shooting into a big basket. I said to him going into the fourth, he was frustrated because he wasn't making shots that he's accustomed to making, and I said, don't allow your offense to dictate your game. Find a way to get your defense into the game and then build off of that. Obviously for him to go out there and get 37, 10 and 5 and score 23 in the fourth quarter was just a tremendous boost for us.

I challenged our guys to start the fourth, this has to be our fourth-quarter defense. We started off 20-5 and built a great lead. The crowd was phenomenal. Huge shoutout to our fans for continuing to make Ball Arena just a hell of a home-court advantage. We really appreciate that.

This was a war. Both these games, they feel like they're five hours long. We won the rebounding battle once again. A lot of guys stepped up and made big, big plays.

Joker, for those that don't know him, he's got 13 playoff triple-doubles now. It's just incredible what he continues to do on a nightly basis on the biggest stage in the world. I thought Bruce Brown off the bench was outstanding as well.

Give Michael Porter credit, 16 and 7, made some big shots. That 10-0 run in the third quarter was a big 10-0 run. Got us back into the game and gave us some momentum and brought that crowd back in.

We did what we were supposed to do. We protected our home court, and now we have to go to L.A. with a very businessman-like mindset.

**Q. After that first half, the foul trouble, the missed shots, for you guys to keep it together, the determination that that took, what did this war, as you put it, show you and kind of tell you about the team**



**that you have?**

MICHAEL MALONE: Well, I thought David Adelman made a great point today. He talked about how we won Game 1 scoring 132 points, and you go back to Game 2 against Phoenix, we won that game scoring 97. In the Playoffs, you're going to have to find a way to win different types of games. This wasn't the shootout that Game 1 was, and when you're not making shots, as you know, that's where it's imperative for you to get stops.

The one thing we did a poor job of in the first half was fouling. They lived at the foul line. I think they had 16 free-throw attempts to go along with 10 points off our seven turnovers. But overall I thought our defense was excellent throughout.

It's going to need to be even that much better to go and try to win a game in L.A. for Game 3.

**Q. After seeing Jamal miss more than a year, what's it like seeing him have a postseason like this?**

MICHAEL MALONE: It's so rewarding. This is not just coach and player. I love Jamal Murray. This is not just like I'm coaching him. We've been together seven years and been through a lot of ups and downs, and to see him back playing at the level he's playing at, the first thought for me is just tremendous pride and just so happy for him. Because I saw the dark days coming back from that ACL.

For him to be here playing at the level that he's playing at is just, I'm just so happy for the man, the young man. He needs to continue to do that. Obviously our goal is not done. We have to win this series. Our goal is to win a championship, and he's going to be a big part of that.

**Q. For all the talk about Jamal's offense, he had four steals tonight, and I think the last one was a lob that he batted away, leads to the Michael Porter Jr three that puts you up 12. How impressive is it that even when he's off to a slow start offensively that he still appears to be engaged on the defensive end?**

MICHAEL MALONE: Well, he was one of our defensive players of the game. To your point, 10 boards, he had 13 contested shots tonight. He had four steals. But that's what you have to do. Like there are going to be nights or



quarters for Jamal, could be a quarter, could be a half, could be three quarters, where your shot is not going. But in the Playoffs you can't be a specialist. Specialists don't play in the Playoffs. You've got to find a way to impact the game, and he did that tonight. He understands that.

We all know one thing about Jamal, man. He just has to see one go in. He got a little mid-range pull-up to go in, kind of looked up to the heavens. That's all he needs, and after that he's shooting into a hula hoop. I'm proud of him. But that's the challenge. My challenge to Jamal is don't be just a scorer. He's going to be an All-Star in this league, and for him to do that, it's got to be scoring, playmaking, rebounding, defending every single night. He has that within him.

**Q. Jamal had said that he had an ear infection on Saturday. What was he able to do, if at all, last weekend?**

MICHAEL MALONE: He hasn't been able to do a whole lot. It's funny, one of the coaches said, when is the last time you heard of a grown-ass man having an ear infection? Usually that's kids in kindergarten, whatever.

But we had a sickness going through the team, and for him to Game 6, Game 1 and Game 2 with the illness that he's had and not having been able to really practice and go through his routine, just speaks volumes of how much of a gamer that he is.

**Q. When you're able to get Nikola doing his triple-double thing but then you have Jamal as the finisher, what does that do for this team and how far can you guys go with that?**

MICHAEL MALONE: Well, that's the key to it. One man can't win a championship. I was with LeBron for five years in Cleveland. We got close, but you need help. Nikola has help. The biggest key is that we're healthy this year. The last two postseasons there was no Jamal Murray. Last year there was no Michael Porter. So Michael Porter, the level he's playing at, the level Jamal is playing at, Aaron Gordon doing a lot of the dirty work, KCP playing his game, Bruce Brown off the bench has just been outstanding.

We know how great Nikola is, but every great player needs help. To have a closer like Jamal is definitely something that we cherish.

**Q. Michael, even for those of us who have seen Joker play, I wonder if he'll ever have a bad game again. Why is he able to be so consistent on the big stage?**

MICHAEL MALONE: Great question. That's one of the

things, as you know, that I always talk about and marvel at is just his consistent greatness. The only thing I can say is that if you want to be consistently great, you have to put in consistent work, and Nikola doesn't skip steps. I really wish you guys, there was a behind-the-curtain look into Nikola Jokic's off-day routine, pre-practice routine, post practice, how he takes care of his body, how he lifts after games. There's no secret. Same thing with LeBron. How is LeBron doing what he's doing at 38 years old? It's not because he's just an athletic marvel. It's because of the time, the commitment and discipline he puts into his craft, his body and his game. Nikola is no different. I think that to me is the key reason why he is just consistently great.

To your point, you're hard-pressed to ever think about Nikola Jokic having a bad game, and I don't want to see any of those coming up.

**Q. Do you think this team is playing with a chip on their shoulder?**

MICHAEL MALONE: I hope so. Yeah, I hope so. Whatever we can use for motivation. I think a lot of our guys, to be honest, they may not admit this or not, you win Game 1 of the [Western Conference Finals], and all everybody talked about was the Lakers. Let's be honest, that was the national narrative was hey, the Lakers are fine. They're down 1-0, but they figured something out. No one talked about Nikola just had a historic performance. He's got 13 triple-doubles now, third all time. What he's doing is just incredible. But the narrative wasn't about the Nuggets, the narrative wasn't about Nikola. The narrative was about the Lakers and their adjustments.

You put that in your pipe, you smoke it and you come back, and you know what, we're going to go up 2-0.

**Q. Do you think that narrative changes tonight?**

MICHAEL MALONE: I don't care if it does because we know our narrative in that locker room. We know that we're not done. We haven't done anything yet. You've got to win a game on the other team's home court if you really want to do something in a series. We know how great that team is, especially on their home court.

We're not celebrating. This is not cause for celebration. This is a cause to continue to dig deep and find ways to be better.

**Q. 42 minutes for Nikola and Jamal. Considering the intensity of the game, we know it's Western Conference Finals but in the following games is there anything we expect to see in terms of minutes they play?**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

MICHAEL MALONE: Yeah, maybe 44. Whatever the game takes. Tonight I did something that I haven't done in the Playoffs. To start the fourth quarter I kept Nikola in. The reason I did that was to start that second quarter, I think it was a 10-0 run for the Lakers and had Nikola and Jamal on the bench at the same time. That was a mistake. We can't do that.

But with long TV timeouts, these national TV games -- Nikola is like Secretariat, man. That guy can run for days.

**Q. This group hasn't been on the road in the Western Conference Finals. It was during the bubble, so that was kind of different. What's the message now as they go into a hostile environment in the Conference Finals atmosphere?**

MICHAEL MALONE: The same as it was against Minnesota, the same as it was against Phoenix. We're not celebrating. We haven't done anything. We're not satisfied.

Our mindset is we're going to win Game 3. We're not trying to worry about Game 4 yet. Take it one game at a time. We know that we're going to have to go into a hostile environment, as you mentioned, and to do that we've got to stay together. We can't beat ourselves, and our defense has to travel. If our defense travels, we'll give ourselves a chance.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.