

NBA Western Conference Finals: Lakers vs. Nuggets

Monday, May 22, 2023

Darvin Ham

Los Angeles Lakers

Game 4: Pregame

Q. Darvin, after Game 3, I asked you just about the way that Denver is getting their shots and the perimeter shooting and how many of their guys are over 40 percent. When you've looked at the film, how much of that do you feel has just been good shot-making and how much do you think it's anything that you guys could do defensively?

DARVIN HAM: I mean, we're getting the ball. Jamal went crazy in the first half last game, obviously, but I think our defense has been solid for the most part. Just they have got guys stepping up, making plays. They are playing fast. They are moving the ball. And when their guys are open, certain guys we shift off of, they have been able to knock down shots. I believe last time I checked, they have like four guys shooting 40-plus percent from three.

So, the shots that they are being forced into and certain other guys, certain rotational players that find the ball in their own hands, they are stepping up and making plays and making shots with it. So just got to keep fighting the good fight and be even more intense and give even more multiple efforts.

Q. And assuming you are not going to tell the starting lineup, even if Dan asks?

DARVIN HAM: That's not an assumption. I'm not going to tell you.

Q. Good assumption then. Since it's the first time you've faced elimination, how much do you feel like you need to go to the best lineups that you've had versus the whole rotation and try to play that out moving forward?

DARVIN HAM: Yeah, obviously you want to have -- no disrespect to anybody on the roster but you obviously want to have your main guys play the lion's share of minutes.

And so, we'll go in and see how the game goes from tip-off and be ready to pivot whichever way we feel like we need



to in order to try to have some success.

Q. Austin has had 20 straight or four straight 20-point games. I know he did that obviously in the regular season, but what has he shown you in the playoffs with just his ability to handle the spotlight and thrive on the biggest stage?

DARVIN HAM: He's just confirming what I always thought about him. The kid is fearless. Plays big in big moments. Competitor. If he does have any type of subpar game on either side of the ball, he's ready and anxious to look at the solutions and try to fix whatever went wrong and sustain what he's doing well. It's been a joy to watch him evolve throughout the course of the season, and mature during this postseason, this being his first one.

It's great. It's a great gift to have. It's a testament to his work, our coaches working with him, his film study, and his understanding how to attack different scenarios on the court. But it's been wonderful. He's been one of our most reliable players all season and especially here in the postseason.

Q. He's leading your team in fourth-quarter scoring in this series but I think he's fourth in shot attempts. Is there more that can be done to kind of get action through him late in games because he's been finding ways to have success?

DARVIN HAM: Yeah, there's an amount of play-calling, but he's out there with Bron and AD. So, we try to play through our two big dogs, and he's been efficient. He's not out there throwing up shots whenever gets them. He's out there trying to make the right play, thus fourth in attempts yet still leading the fourth quarter in scoring. He's just playing the right way.

Q. And then you guys have not really shot the ball that well this series. Curious outside of Austin, Lonnie, Rui, have you considered Malik? Have you considered some of these other shooters in your rotation and would you hesitate to use them in an elimination game like this after not playing them?

DARVIN HAM: I just think every credible option is indeed an option, and if we need to push those buttons, we certainly will. We like the mix of players we've had. We've



had some unfortunate plays did not go our way. We missed a ton of layups at the rim throughout the series. Our transition defense has been an issue.

So more than personnel, I think it's just performance and how we are performing as a group, not any specific individual. Like as a team, we have to do better, and especially today. The main focus first and foremost defensively has to be to be great in transition. And then, you know, there are some other things along with that, too -- making Murray, Jokic, uncomfortable as much as we possibly can, and again, representing the guys. Knowing who we are closing out to and the other guys on the perimeter.

And then offensively, playing with pace, as much pace as possible in the full court and the half court, doing things with a purpose. I'm sure I won't have to worry about that tonight. Everyone knows what's on the table. So, I expect us to come out.

But any individual, you know, that's why they are on our team. Each of those guys you name has had their moments throughout the course of the time we've had them since the deadline and the guys that's been here the entire year. If we need to go to them, we will but as a team, we have to come out and play the right kind of basketball.

Q. You know, if you guys were up 3-0 instead of down 3-0, I'd be asking you if having to play at that level of intensity for the past three months has been a benefit to you but because you're down 3-0, I have to ask you if you're tired? Is all the strain of getting to this point is taking a toll? Do you see that in their play at all?

DARVIN HAM: I mean, I feel like the guys are a little disappointed, but I don't think they are discouraged. We had our team meetings and watched film and everything else today. The spirits were high. The positivity was at an all-time high.

We understand the circumstances, but we also understand everybody that's in that room, you know, we've performed when we had our backs against the wall in different situations in terms of trying to get -- even get into this position to be here.

So again like I told them, the only thing that matters is when we have staring us in the eye in our immediate present, and that's Game 4.

What's gone on the first three games, you could toss around and think about it but if you're not just extracting some, extracting some nuggets -- no pun intended --

extract some nuggets that can help you find a solution to trying to play better, then yeah, we'll do that. But to belabor we shoulda did this, coulda, woulda, shoulda, nah. We just have to focus on what we've got to handle tonight.

Q. DLo, I guess you would say it's a shooting slump in this series. At this point are there things that you can do, different ways to get him open? What can you do at this point?

DARVIN HAM: Again, just continue to encourage him, support him and tell him to remain aggressive and have a next-play mentality. If you have a shot, wide open, you miss it; a shot that you normally make, and then you drop your head, drop your shoulders and that disappointment in yourself leads to another two or three -- a chain reaction of two or three bad plays following that missed shot.

So, it's just can't have a conscience. He has to go out there and perform like he's always performed and be aggressive, and the shots he knows he can make, he has to take and just be assertive and decisive with the ball in his hands.

Q. You touched on it a little bit but now that this team faces elimination for the first time this season, does that change your pregame message to your players?

DARVIN HAM: The message is strong. We stand on our work and our preparation but overall we said the same thing since day one: Competitiveness, togetherness, accountability and in this specific circumstance, coming with the energy, the effort and the urgency, and because, you know, rotations, coverages, game plan, all of that stuff, it matters, but the most important thing is the spirit you bring to all of that.

If you are thinking that's going to make you play better because, you know, the X's and O's part of it, then you're wrong. You have to come and bring the spirit to that. Each and every guy having the right spirit and right competitive mindset is going to allow anything and everything to work on our behalf.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.