

NBA Western Conference Finals: Lakers vs. Nuggets

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Michael Malone

Denver Nuggets

Game 4: Pregame

Q. Before Game 3 you talked about human nature. What is the requisite attitude you guys need to have to end this tonight?

MICHAEL MALONE: Just a mindset of going out there and taking it. They are not going to give us anything. Obviously, they are facing elimination, very dangerous team. So, our mindset has to be, be the more aggressive team and just overall, just-take-it mentality. They are not going to give us anything.

Q. Jamal was talking last game about where he's improved most the last couple years and he said the game has really slowed down for him ever since his injury. Is that also where you've seen the most growth and maturation in his game over the last couple seasons?

MICHAEL MALONE: Yeah, I think the older you get, the more mature you get and the more games and the more big games you play, I think the game does slow down for you.

For me, I think the greatest challenge I always have for Jamal is on top of having the game slow down, is not just being content with being a scorer, an elite scorer. I think he's shown this postseason, like he did the last postseason in the Bubble, that he has the ability to impact the game across the board.

His scoring, his play-making, his rebounding, as well as his defense, and when he's doing all of those things on a consistent basis, to me, he's one of the best guards in the entire league.

Q. You've talked about five more wins, but tonight could be an historic night for the Nuggets franchise, not only a first-ever playoff sweep, but also first-ever trip to the Finals could be clinched tonight. Do you feel the weight of that at all? You're on precipice of making history for the franchise that's never been done before?



MICHAEL MALONE: For me I can't speak for all of our players, I'm not worrying about all of that. That stuff will take care of itself. I'm worried about trying to defend the Lakers and LeBron and AD and Austin Reaves. I'm worried about our team getting off to a good start like we did in Game 3. I'm worried about our team not beating ourselves like we did in Game 3 -- 30 assists and only six turnovers. Those are the things I'm worried about.

All the other stuff will take care of itself at some point. But the task front of us is to go out there and win Game 4, and that's all we're worried about right now.

Q. Carmelo Anthony retired today. Obviously, he did a lot for the Nuggets franchise and you coached against him a bunch of times. What impact do you think he meant to the franchise?

MICHAEL MALONE: Obviously, I wasn't fortunate to coach a guy like Carmelo in my years in this league. Coached against him a lot of times, as you mentioned.

Carmelo is still loved throughout Denver. He wore that Nuggets jersey with pride and did a lot of great things while in a Denver Nuggets uniform, as well as all the other uniforms he wore in a very illustrious career.

When you think of Carmelo, you think of one of the more elite scorers in NBA history, a guy from the D.C. metro area, goes to Syracuse, wins a championship and comes into the NBA and was just a bucket-getter from day one. And knowing him a very little bit, obviously congratulations to him on a hell of a career, as he officially announced his retirement, and he's always welcome. Once a Nugget, always a Nugget. He's always welcome to come back, and we'd love to have him around at any point in time.

Q. Considering you guys had to deal with a good number of injuries in previous seasons, what were the approaches this season with players, training staff and coaching staff to have a cleaner bill of health this year?

MICHAEL MALONE: You have to be lucky. Injuries are a part of it. As we well know in Denver, the last two years, injuries to key players really hindered our chances of winning at a high level.



So, as you go into a season like this with Jamal Murray coming back from his ACL, you have to be really smart in terms of how do we approach back-to-backs, how do we approach practices, how do we approach his load, his minutes. And while doing so, it's really important to have a big-picture approach because you can get caught up in the emotions of a season, and sometimes those emotions can force you to make poor decisions.

So I give our training staff, our doctors, and all the meetings and the communications that we had this year, for Jamal, for Michael, for Nikola, for Aaron, for KCP throughout, just keeping our eyes on the prize and a very big-picture mindset, where we didn't feel the need to play our guys an extraordinary number of minutes per game but also didn't feel a need where we had to put them in harm's way by overplaying them.

I think, knock-on-wood, that's allowed us to get to this point in the season right now.

Q. Your supporting cast has really excelled this postseason, especially this series. What have you noticed behind the scenes in the locker room from Nikola fostering that type of environment?

MICHAEL MALONE: I think it speaks to how selfless our group is. Nikola would be the first one to admit he is not going to win a playoff game, a series or a potential championship by himself. Just one player doesn't do it. And obviously Jamal has played phenomenal in this first postseason back from that ACL, but Jamal is aware of that as well. We got Kentavious Caldwell-Pope for a reason. We traded for Aaron a few years ago for a reason and signed Bruce Brown in free agency for a reason, and as you mentioned, those guys are all stepping up and playing at a high level.

That's what it takes. We are up 3-0 in the Western Conference Finals because we are a team and it's five guys out there working as one and we all believe in each other, and that's belief in one another I think for us is a very powerful, tangible thing.

Q. Was there somebody who you consulted who also had a catastrophic injury like that, be it a coach or a player, who can help you try and model what you did with the trainers and doctors?

MICHAEL MALONE: For me, I did not but I know Jamal Murray did. I know he reached out to guys that had been down a very similar path and just to kind of pick their brain and to see what were the biggest obstacles in returning to play, and not just returning to play, but in returning to play

at an even higher level than prior to the injury.

So you know, being around the league as long as I have been, seeing injuries time and time again, and it's something that you have to deal with as an organization, I give our organization a lot of credit because I think Jamal felt, I think Michael Porter felt, not one time was there us rushing them back trying to put them in harm's way.

We cared about them. We wanted them to come back when they were ready, not just physically but mentally. I know last year in the playoffs, I know maybe there was some hope that Jamal would be able to play but he just wasn't there physically, mentally, and we supported him 1000 percent, knowing this year would be the year we felt we could make a run.

And thankfully to this point, things have worked out.

Q. It's so rare that Nikola shows the kind of emotion that he showed late in Game 3. He hits the big three, runs back on defense screaming. What type of impact do you think that has on the rest of the team when he conveys that type of engagement and emotion?

MICHAEL MALONE: Whether he's quiet, whether he's screaming, I think our players understand what Nikola brings to the table. When he's shown that kind of emotion, which is rare, to your point, I think it probably just maybe gives our guys even more confidence in Nikola and more collective confidence in what we're trying to do.

Because when he's doing that, obviously that means things are going pretty well for us in that moment, and we all understand the luxury that we have coaching and/or playing with, in our eyes, the best player in the NBA.

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