

NBA Western Conference Finals: Lakers vs. Nuggets

Monday, May 22, 2023

Darvin Ham

Los Angeles Lakers

Game 4: Postgame

Denver Nuggets 113, Los Angeles Lakers 111

Q. LeBron played the entire game except for those four seconds at the end of the first half. What did you make of his effort and on those final possessions what were you trying to get to?

DARVIN HAM: He just came out with a mindset to keep this thing going. He came in the building, as he's been all year, all throughout the playoffs, with a focus, a determination, to get it done by any means necessary. I just thanked them all. It was great, the competitive spirit, you know, it was phenomenal, from day one, getting to this point from which we came, you know, digging ourselves out of a deep, deep hole and then being able to be a part of this 2023 NBA postseason, and then become one of the final four teams, was a hell of a year, a hell of an experience and hell of a turnaround, and did a complete 180.

You know, he was a big part of that in terms of his communication, his leadership, he and AD both. He just came out ready to go. You know, but the end of the quarter stuff, the end of the last -- I should say, the end of the game, thought he was trying to get downhill, man. And again, not to use any excuses or make any excuses, but there's contact on just about every play in the NBA now when you drive the ball, and what's considered a violation and what's not and what's called, and what's not, I'm oblivious, I don't know. All you want is fairness and consistency, that's something I've always said.

Just trying to get the ball in the hands of our best player and allow him to go make a play in an area on the floor where he's comfortable.

But again, not to take anything away from Denver. They are a hell of a ballclub. They have been great all year. They have been great for a few years now. They have a hell of a 1-2 punch in Jokic and Jamal. Wish them nothing but the best. Mike Malone, happy for him and his staff. They have done a phenomenal job of just establishing a



culture up there in Denver and making that a tough place to play, well-balanced roster, very well coached, great vets.

Some guys that have an opportunity to get a ring for the first time, DeAndre, Jeff Green, kudos to Ish Smith, some guys that's been around the league a long, long time. And then Joker getting an opportunity, Jamal getting an opportunity to step out on the final stage to make something happen.

Nothing but love and respect for the Denver Nuggets. Love the way they play and what they are about. We also saw ways that even though this is year one, and losing sucks, you know, we -- I think we have an opportunity to do something special here, also, and we've just got to build off of this. Everything we put into turning this thing around, we have to not only sustain it, we have to take it to a higher level, and that's what this summer is going to be about.

Q. On that note, zooming out, the way the season started, trade deadline to where you are now, how would you summarize?

DARVIN HAM: I just think it's great. It was nothing but growth, nothing but an education, and you know, staying with it, trying to remain consistent. I told those guys their consistency of coming to the gym from the time when we had pieces, talented pieces on the roster, but still some that did not necessarily fit perfectly together to the point where we did find the right pieces and they fit smoothly; the culture that was set, reset, in terms of competitiveness, togetherness, accountability. You know, us coming to the gym each and every day trying to get better at something and being focused on getting better at something, was nothing short of amazing.

It's just been a hell of a year. The support I got, myself, personally, my staff, from Jeanie, Rob. To go through some of those tough times early, you know, we don't get that support, we probably don't make it to this point.

But again, everybody pulling the rope in the same direction. It was a very, very special year.

Q. When LeBron, I think it was in Dallas, goes to the ground, says he hears a pop, meets with people, maybe needs to have season-ending surgery, did you at any point envision being able to count on him for 48 minutes a game? At that point you might not have

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known if you would get 48 minutes all season. What did he have to go through to get back and what did he give tonight?

DARVIN HAM: I just think he went through a rigorous process of just round-the-clock treatment, different exercises, bringing in different foot specialists, to first of all, confirm the fact that he couldn't damage the area any further, and but to also re-treat it, re-strengthen it and put himself in a position where he could come back and join which was then a newly formed group that had players in it that totally complemented his playing style and the style of play we wanted to have coming into this season.

So, his ability to work through it, AD's ability to work through it, just all of the injuries we had throughout the season, and the guys missing different stretches, long stretches, I just think there was a belief there that this thing could really work. We got some consistency in terms of people being in the lineup and guys trying to get everything they could on the fly.

You know, didn't have a training camp. Wasn't a whole -- with the new team from the deadline on, obviously there's no training camp. Practice time was limited because you're dealing with multiple injuries. So, there was a lot of film study, a lot of walk-throughs. The shootarounds pretty much became our practices, regardless of who our opponent was. Just trying to work on us and get better at what we needed to get better at, and continue to fight through and hopefully our leaders, our captains, LeBron and AD, would be available at the right time and they were.

That's a bunch of work by our performance team and everybody around them. Just, again, those guys being meticulous about not only just getting well, getting healed, but strengthening so we could make a push.

Q. To stay smaller picture for a second, obviously the result is the same as games 1 through 3 but you did change the starting lineup, and now that you're immediately removed from it, what did you feel about that switch and do you look back and wonder, could I use that at a different time of the series?

DARVIN HAM: I believe we started the series with Dennis in the lineup in Game 1 coming off Golden State. You know, you can go back, look at the lineups. You know, we were fortunate at the deadline to make a move that gave us a ton of serviceable players. You're always going to question whether or not you should have took a timeout or put the ball in someone's hand at a certain particular time of the game or switched up your defenses. I just felt like, you know, no matter who we put in that lineup, they were going to step up and give it their all, no matter what the results said.

But this lineup that we finished with in particular, obviously we want to just be aggressive, be physical; thus the reason Tristan came in. I thought he played huge in his time on the floor. Gave us some really good, inspiring minutes, high-spirited minutes. Those guys, that's a tough, tough task, you know. Trying to slow down Jokic, trying to slow down Jamal.

But I thought our guys, you know, they tried their best. That starting lineup, each starting lineup that we had out there, they didn't go out there to fail, you know what I mean. Just things happen the way they happened during the course of a basketball game.

Kudos to those guys who were removed from -- in DLo's case, removed from the starting lineup and in Vando's case, didn't get a chance to play tonight. But those guys were nothing short of professional. Understood. You know, did what they needed to do in the restructured part of the rotation, and everybody was supportive. Really wanted to come out and get this win tonight. I thought we fought as hard as we could fight.

Q. Even though it was a sweep, you guys were in all four fourth quarters, at one point it was a one-possession game in each of them. What's the key for this group moving forward to kind of take next step? What do you think that key is for you guys to be able to execute on a stage like this and come out winning those games?

DARVIN HAM: I just think, again, the phrase for me is self-inflicted wounds. You can't have those. You know, being good at transition defense, not fouling, not pushing them to the bonus, getting the rebound, boxing out, you know, keeping them off their offensive glass, not allowing them to get those second, third, fourth chances.

And then on our side, not turn the ball over and making layups. I don't think coverages or adjustments have anything to do with that. That's just playing harder, playing better.

I thought the third quarter, you know, we were twofold, we missed a ton of point-blank shots, and we allowed them to get really active on their offensive glass. When we would stop them and they would get another crack at it and get another crack at it, and now instead of giving up a rebound, you're giving up threes. And the sign of a great team is, you make any mistake, they are going to make you pay for it, and they did just that.

Going forward, we have to be determined going into next year of controlling what we can control, giving ourselves

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every chance to win by doing the little things. You know, again, being great in transition, showing our hands, being disciplined. Coming up with rebounds, defensive rebounds in particular, playing with pace, consistent pace, not turning the ball over and making the shots we're supposed to make.

Q. AD didn't get going until the fourth quarter. Was that a case of LeBron being so forceful or you guys not looking for AD enough?

DARVIN HAM: During the flow of the game there are a lot, several play calls, and LeBron had it going. And A is screening and rolling and he had some looks that he wasn't able to finish. But at the end of the day, he competed. And he kept at it and he had some good moments late. The way we play, it's an equal opportunity offense, and guys are going to want to push a guy on; they see Bron going and making shots, then no one -- that's the beautiful thing about this group that we assembled, no one is begging for touches. Like they see one of the teammates that's cooking, they are going to continue to feed them.

So, it's just I think more by happenstance. It wasn't anything deliberate.

Q. You clearly poured your heart into this season. What are the emotions going through your head right now and what did you tell the guys in the locker room immediately after the game?

DARVIN HAM: I just told them to take some time to take stock of what this meant. I thanked them again for the season, for supporting me, for communication, giving it a chance to work by buying in, and then everyone coming in and having a focus to get better.

From a mental/spiritual standpoint, I have the best job in the world. I thank God every day. It's tough to really be upset. I'm extremely disappointed, but I'd be really distraught and upset if we didn't come out and compete. No one wants to get swept. Don't, you know, get me confused. Like no one, especially within myself, within that locker room, everyone we have in our building, no one wants to go out like this.

But the thing that gives me joy is the fact that we competed every night. We competed every game in this series. I just told the guys to take stock of what this meant, what this feeling feels like right now, what we went through in an entire season and what we had to do to get to this point.

Now, investigate the process. Try to strengthen yourselves, whether it's your game, your body, understand what we are trying to do moving forward in terms of

reestablishing the winning culture around here. To go from not being thought much about to start the season, to now finishing in the top final four. Coming into next year, there's going to be expectations, as it should be within this organization, and what this organization has meant to the NBA and to the world of sports as a whole.

You know, each and every individual, each and every player, coach, any person, front office person, any person working for our organization, we've got to see how we can take this momentum and take it to an even higher level to the point where we are the ones that's outside celebrating. We're the ones that's on our way to that final stage of playing in the NBA Finals. I didn't come here to have wins, have more wins than losses or make a playoff round one or make a playoff run. I came to win.

I've been fortunate enough, blessed enough to experience winning at all levels, and the highest level time and time again, and so my focus is all there. That's my focus.

Q. My question is sort of about Austin and Rui and DLo, you mentioned Denver's culture over there. They have had a core that's come up and gone through the ups and downs of the playoffs. For these young guys, how important will this be to their development and what do you want them to get out of it?

DARVIN HAM: I think it's going to be a feeling that they are going to be searching for. You know, these guys are so young in their careers. Once you get a taste of winning and once you get a taste of what this feels like and there are 26 other teams sitting at home and you're one of the last few playing, it makes you want to work that much harder and tighten up your game that much more and totally embrace and dive into the culture that we have reestablished of togetherness, competitiveness.

Those gentlemen, Rui, Austin work feverishly on their games and they watch film tirelessly, and you see it translate on the game floor. I love them to death. I appreciate them believing in what we were pushing, myself and my staff. We worked our asses to try to reestablish a winning culture around here and I think we have done that. So now to let it all go down the drain over the summer by playing too much golf would be disappointing, and I'm only talking about one guy to my left.

No, these dudes are my guys, starting with this guy right here [Austin Reaves], Mr. Fearless himself. You've heard enough to me. Talk to my guys.

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