

NBA Finals: Bucks vs. Suns

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

Khris Middleton

Pat Connaughton

Milwaukee Bucks

Game 4 Postgame

Milwaukee Bucks 109, Phoenix Suns 103

Q. Khris, you've played alongside Giannis and this team and while you've been doing it, your game has been dissected, sometimes maligned, but you've had great postseason performances. Do you think playing a game like this on this stage at this time of the series, do you feel like a weight is off your shoulders at all?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: No, not necessarily. I mean, I'm not perfect. I feel like I've had a great career so far. You know, every year I feel like I advance my game and as an organization, we take a step forward most of the years I've been here.

As far as the other stuff, I really don't care about or worry about myself. With this organization, it's all about taking a step each day in the right direction.

Q. Giannis talked about how much he trusts you and you saw the play after the layup, how everybody came onto you and picked you up. What is it like to have that trust of your teammates? Does that help you kind of block out any outside noise that you get because you have the backing of your team?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: For sure. I mean, my teammates, first, my coaches, and everybody else in the organization, their opinion matters to me the most. I really, I'm sorry, I don't care what you guys write or what you guys think, whether it's good or bad. But for my teammates to have the confidence in me, trust in me, that's most important of all.

Q. Pat, just what are you thinking as Giannis goes up for the block? You're over by Crowder trailing the play.

PAT CONNAUGHTON: Yeah, I was on Crowder. The guy was pulling up after the pick-and-roll. I was thinking I was right around the elbow at the time. And the honest thought that was going through my head was more or less kind of



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like shock and awe, when the block happened, I kind of looked like -- and luckily P.J. came across the lane and grabbed the rebound because I forgot for a split-second to go grab it.

I kind of said, in my opinion, it's the best block of all time. Obviously, we're a little biased and you can talk about the LeBron block as well. But as far as a block where he was covering the pick-and-roll, he had to judge where the pass was, where Ayton was catching it and trying to dunk it, above the box, it's about as impressive as you can get.

Q. Khris, you were far side, I believe.

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Yeah.

Q. What was your vantage point?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Kind of the same thing as him, say one of -- excuse my language, but it was one of those oh [expletive] moments. We gave up a layup and next thing you know he's blocking it. It was a great effort. Didn't give up on the play when it seemed like they had open layup or dunk. That's what we need in the Finals, everybody get that extra effort and he came through for us big on that play.

Q. Obviously, all of your teammates have talked about how much they trust you. Pat had missed two threes at the start of the fourth quarter and then he steps into a big one and manages to hit it. What do you think when you see Pat line up another one and line up an open shot?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: That's what we want him to do, that what he's out there for. He's hit many big shots for us this season and throughout this playoff run. He's out there for a reason. And if he has an opening to shoot and he's wide open, he's got to shoot it, whether it's make or miss, it's just going to keep the defense honest, for one, and, two, he's a great shooter.

Q. As you obviously went on that 10-0 run in the final couple minutes, you had to get picked up off the ground because you were clearly out of gas after that layup. What allowed you to summon the energy needed to make those plays on that moment?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Everybody's tired. Everybody's banged up. Just have to give it your all and leave it all on the court. We can rest and sleep and get treatment after the game. But while that game is being played, there's no excuses of exhaustion or something is hurt. If you're hurt, you can't be out there. But that's all, give it your all.

Q. What is it about this building that you thrive so much in it? And even next door, you weren't quite the same player you've been since you have gotten here.

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Just the energy. I've been playing in this building for two years now. A lot of shots. I guess I've got to get some extra shots in Phoenix and whatnot. But just got to find a way to knock down shots when I'm on the road. It's been tough for me all postseason long. Just got to find a way.

Q. Seemed like earlier in the fourth quarter you were hanging in and they opened a lead. Was there a point with you where you said, I can win this for us?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: No. They hit a three to start off the fourth quarter, but for the majority of the game, we had a lot of great looks and missed them, a lot of layups, a lot of open threes. You just hope at some point they are going to fall but at the same time you have to get stops, and that's the main thing in that fourth quarter, we were able to get stops when we needed to.

Q. I hate to oversimplify it, but your team was shooting 38 percent. Did you feel like you just needed to take over at that point in those final two minutes? And then secondly, we don't talk enough about your free throw shooting and how clutch it is. How much work do you put into that or is that something that's been so automatic for so long it's effortless?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: As far as free throws, it's just a routine thing. We do free throw shooting games after practice every day. I shoot free throws for my pregame routine. It's just a routine thing for me.

As far as the fourth quarter, late in the fourth quarter, we just ran sets that allowed me to get to my spots. After that I just got to make reads. Whether to shoot, whether to find an open guy, Giannis on a roll. It's just reading the defense at that point. Just luckily, thankfully, I hit some shots.

Q. Late when you switch over onto Devin, in late-game situations like that, is there any thought of time on the clock, score, maybe they are hunting for that matchup to a degree the way he's playing? And I guess speak

to that and maybe walk us through how you ended up with that contest and the miss.

PAT CONNAUGHTON: Yeah, I mean, I have confidence in my athleticism. I think I can defend at a high level. I think sometimes they are looking for a matchup and I think sometimes it's like a pride thing, right. I think he got me once on a pump-fake that I can't fall for, giving him free points at the free throw line, and we've talked about it and I have to be better in that situation. And he's also a terrific player. So he made a few shots on me earlier in the game, sometime in the third quarter I believe but they were tough, they were contested shots. At the end of the day, that's my job. It's to keep him in front, be physical, try to make sure that I'm matching his physicality and making sure he's not backing down or getting free, and if he's going to make tough, contested shots, that's what he's going to have to do in order to put them in a position to try to win the game. That's all I thought at the end of the game was that he wasn't going to get by me, and I was going to be physical enough so it kind of threw him off when he did have to take the jumpshot.

Q. Bud said it was a mental toughness game. Would you say that was accurate in terms of having to dig into something a little bit in the final few minutes?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: It's a grind. A lot of playoff games, especially when it comes late in the fourth quarter, it's a grind. Just got to find a way to get it, get loose balls, get rebounds, figure out a way to get stops against great players. That's all I can really say about it. It's a grind.

Q. For both of you, same topic. Khris, do you know how many shots you attempted tonight? A playoff career-high 33. When did you realize that was going to be that kind of night for you to take that many shots? And Pat, when did you start to notice it was a Khris Middleton night?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: I don't count shots. I just try to let the game come to me, the shots that I have to take no matter what, no matter how many times I shoot in a minute, no matter how many times I miss, that's just the way I play the game. I don't realize any stats or shots or points really until the end of the game.

PAT CONNAUGHTON: I think it's always a Khris Middleton kind of night. I mean, at the end of the day, he makes the right plays. Tonight it called for him to be more aggressive with a jumpshot but he's always going to be aggressive. He finds the right guys, he finds the open man, if they double him or try to blitz him, he's the guy that we want to have the ball at the end of the game. And we have great leadership, Khris, Giannis, Jrue, no matter



what's happening during the game, we all trust their leadership and their ability to make the right play and whether that's shooting, passing, play-making, defending, whatever it might be.

You know, tonight was one of those nights that Khris took over and it's great and we're happy to have him on our side as opposed to anything else. I'm just thrilled that he's been able to kind of show the world it because we see it every single day.

Q. Obviously it's tough to keep Ayton off the glass when he's getting rebounds, but in the beginning of the fourth when you were trailing, when guys like Pat and P.J. and Bobby are going up and gang rebounding and taking those opportunities away and fighting for those boards, what does that do for you guys as a team, just energy-wise, and maybe giving you guys some momentum?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: Just gives us a chance. When we go small, that's one of the biggest emphasis that we talk about in our timeouts and our huddle is we have to find a way to block out, put bodies on their guys crashing, especially Ayton, he's a beast down there. He finds a way to get tips on balls to tip them out to teammates and to grab them and give them extra possessions, extra threes. With guys, Pat, Tuck, like you said, when everybody comes in and puts a body on him and helps rebound, it just allows us to play faster.

Q. You conceded earlier that you may be biased but it's time for you to break down which is the greatest block of all time: LeBron's chase-down or what Giannis did tonight, and why?

PAT CONNAUGHTON: I would look at the criteria of greatest block of all time based off of difficulty of the block and then time and score. I think obviously LeBron's time and score probably has the edge in that situation because of when it was and helped them literally win a championship that game. But I think the difference between the time and score difference and then the difficulty of the block difference, gives the edge to Giannis just because a chase-down block, you have a little bit more of an ability to read, and obviously it's a great block and we're talking about two of the greatest blocks of all time and I don't want to discredit that block.

But Giannis was guarding the pick-and-roll. He was guarding the pick-and-roll, that's a play that they have done time and time again. Book threw a great pass, threw it high and away from any defender and Giannis was able to recover. He's Defensive Player of the Year, two-time MVP for a reason and I think it's those types of play to be able to

read where Ayton is, where the ball is, and to have the athleticism to get that high and get literally all of the basketball is why I would give the edge to him.

Q. Khris, your personality is always interesting, when we hear you on Zoom we have to turn up the volume and I think you've always hated the limelight, and now I think you're bringing every teammate you can to a joint press conference. Is it true that you just hate it or you want to share it or you're trying to deflect a little bit? It's the Finals. This is your moment.

KHRIS MIDDLETON: It's hard to explain, really. The teammate thing is just a timing thing. I guess I tell guys to wait on me.

PAT CONNAUGHTON: I was hoping he was going to have to answer every question.

KHRIS MIDDLETON: As far as the limelight, whatever, I really don't care about it too much. I just like doing my thing, being around my teammates. Like I said earlier, the credit I get from my teammates or -- how do I say this -- whatever my teammates think of me, that's what means the most. I love to talk to them, hang out with them some. As far as being all over the place on magazines, being on commercials, being interviewed all the time, that's just not me. I like staying low key, I like staying out of the way. That's who I am.

Q. You are up four, going to the free throw line, you guys had just gotten a stop, and all of a sudden you feel 7-foot, 240 pounds hug you; what are you thinking other than, man, I'm tired, let me shoot this free throw?

KHRIS MIDDLETON: I mean, just love those moments. I know how much he put into that game. He know how much I put into the game and we knew how much everybody put into the game. It seemed like the game was over there for a minute but nobody caved. We stayed with it. We grinded out a couple of possessions and found a way to win a ballgame.

That's something that we struggled with sometimes during the season. But what we said, that's what it's all about, learning, learning how to win different types of ballgames, different styles. And that's what that was moment was about, finding a way to win a game where it seemed like we weren't going to win, and give us a chance to still have a life, going to Phoenix with a little bit of confidence, with a little bit of momentum.

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