BREAKDOWN: 2014 EASTERN CONFERENCE FINALS – GAME 1

MIAMI HEAT VS INDIANA PACERS

The 2014 Eastern Conference Finals is not just about deciding which team makes it to the NBA Finals - it is a battle for the future of the NBA. The "position-less" Miami Heat vs the positional (and traditional) Indiana Pacers. In Game 1, the chess match undoubtedly went to the home team.....

**Lineups**

Heat: Mario Chalmers, Dwyane Wade, LeBron James, Shane Battier, Chris Bosh

Pacers: George Hill, Lance Stephenson, Paul George, David West, Roy Hibbert

Matchups: pretty even - LBJ guarded West, with Battier occasionally switching off (David guarded Shane on the other end) - Lance v Wade - George v James.

**It’s all about the 3’s**

In an NBA Era where the 3's dominate style of play, both Frank Vogel and Erik Spoelstra decided to get their number 3's started early. Wade initiated the Heat offense on the first few plays, with LeBron James in full decoy mode away from the ball. Knowing Indiana likes to go UNDER on screens, Spo ran a lot of curl action with Dwyane either scoring or dishing to an open Bosh.

On the other end, George Hill (also #3) got the word from the sideline to be ultra-aggressive. It was almost an out-of-body experience for the grossly inconsistent Hill. He hit his first few shots, including two three-pointers. Indiana ran him off numerous picks and had him play 'give-n-go' with his teammates (simple basketball).

My Notes: In getting Hill off early, I felt Lance Stephenson was far too passive in the 1st quarter. He didn't make Wade work at all on the defensive end. Also, Indiana didn't take advantage of West down-low enough, being guarded by Shane Battier at times (hard fronting). Pacers much punish Heat's small lineup of Bosh, James, and Battier more as the series goes on. David isn't tall or long for a PF.

*\* Putting Battier/Haslem on him allows him to see over the defense and hit teammates from the high post.*

Neither team went to their bench early in the game. Around 4-minute mark, Luis Scola subbed in for West, Ray Allen for Wade. James and George played the entire 1st qtr, matching up against each other. Vogel also decided to give Hibbert extended time in the 1st period of play.

*\*With Evan Turner out (strep throat), ex-Heat Rasual Butler had the task of chasing Ray Allen off three-point line (Ray hit two early 3's). Spo, meanwhile, countered with ex-Pacer James Jones (subbing in for Battier). Who says it's not a rivalry?*

Lineups to end 1st qtr: Cole, Allen, James, Jones, Anderson - Watson, Butler, George, Scola, Hibbert.

End of qtr score: 24-30 (Indiana)

**2nd quarter:** Stephenson re-enters the game, running the point. Playing with four reserves (Watson, Butler, Scola, Mahinmi) it was a different Lance. ULTRA aggressive, he either got his own shot or found guys who couldn't get their own. {Indiana will need this earlier from 'LS' next game.}

*\* For a two-minute stretch in the quarter, Spo used BOTH Chris Anderson and (Chris) Bosh together, in a more traditional lineup. {This is something Heat may go back to in Game 2...3...4... you get it.}*

The Pacers held the lead the entire 2nd qtr, fluctuating from 9-7-9-10.

Halftime score: 45-55 (Indiana)

Stats: Rebounds (16-19) and Turnovers (6-7) were basically even. When facing the Heat, playing even in the TO game is really like having an EDGE. Miami lives off turning you over, and they didn't do too much of it in this half. The Pacers did shoot it nearly 10% better (59.5 compared to 50), mainly a result of the ball movement - Pacers had 15 assists to Heat's 10.

The 2nd half started with major adjustments from Miami, ones that gave the psychological edge to the Pacers. Spo started Udonis Haslem at PF instead of Battier. He also had LeBron James guard Stephenson (not George), a major sign of respect.

*Message sent here: we (MIA) can't play our style so we're going to change to play yours. Also, our best player/defender has to guard your 2nd best player, who killed us in first half. Major psychological advantage for Frank Vogel's crew.*

The Pacers were in an unfamiliar role in the 2nd half, playing from ahead and trying to keep/extend a lead (after playing from behind most this postseason). While the half started with more of the same (good ball movement and strong halfcourt defensive), Pacer execution did suffer as the 3rd quarter winded down. But, that is what super star's are for...

**Paul George making super star plays**

One TWO occasions in the 4th qtr, 'PG' had three-point plays to re-gain crucial momentum for the Pacers.

Score: 74-83 (first minute of 4th) George drives and gets 'And One' on Anderson inside to extend lead to 74-86.

Score: 84- 95 (6 min mark) George hits three-pointer from the corner to extend lead to 84-98.

**Defend Without Fouling!**

We've all heard this mantra from Frank Vogel and his players. This was definitely on display in Game 1. By the 4th qtr, Indiana had shot 25 FTs compared to Miami's 12. They also re-gained their execution as the qtr went on, cruising to the victory.

**Heat adjustments for Game 2:**

1. PICK A LINEUP - I personally would prefer starting a more traditional lineup with Haslem at PF. The problem is, if Miami does this and trails early in Game 2, where do you go from there? Back to Battier?? It's a dangerous game for Spo. The sooner he picks a lineup and sticks with it, the better off his team will be.

2. MORE LEBRON EARLY - James didn't touch the ball on the Heat's first few possessions, as Wade got himself going and also tried to prove something to both himself and Lance Stephenson. In Game 2, I expect a lot more LBJ early - setting the table for himself and his teammates (as it should be).

3. DON'T OVERREACT TO 3'S - Whichever lineup Spo chooses, the key is to not over-play Indiana outside. The Pacers hit 6 of 9 three-pointers in the 1st half of Game 1. That will likely not happen again this calendar year, let alone this series. Miami, a team who's defense is all about over-playing and blitzing on the perimeter, should stay solid on Indiana's shooters. Limit the driving angles which allowed them their 15 first half assists.

Memo to Pacers: Lance Stephenson is your emotional leader. You can't allow him to be passive again to start Game 2, letting Dwyane Wade rest on defense. If this happens, your team may be in a deep hole by the time he 'turns it on' in the 2nd qtr (like he did on Sunday). Let Lance set the table just as LeBron does for Heat. This may also force Spo into tough decision. Who does he have James guard to start Game 2 - George or Stephenson?? Decisions.....Decisions.......