



No KD No Ring Part II

By: Austin Rader

The Toronto Raptors are NBA champions.

Just let that sink in for a second.

Don't let the injuries fool you. This was an upset. Most people picked the Warriors to win this series. Yes, Klay Thompson sat out the entire game three, and missed much of the second half of game six. But Toronto wasn't going to blow a 3-1 lead to a Kevin Durant-less Warriors team. They flat-out earned this title.

This is a team that has been swimming in mediocrity for most of its existence. They joined the league in 1995, and had virtually nothing to show for their two decades in the NBA. But this week they ended one of the greatest dynasties of all time. The Warriors have been the most dominant basketball team over the past five years. And a team from "hockey crazed" Canada dominated them on the game's biggest stage.

But how did the Raptors win this series?

For starters, as I predicted before the series began, if Kevin Durant doesn't play, Golden State won't win. And he only logged ten minutes in the Finals before getting hurt again. However, in those ten minutes, we saw the impact KD has on his team. He poured in 11 points on 3 of 3 shooting from beyond the arc. If Durant doesn't play in that game, Toronto most likely would have closed out the series on their home court with a game 5 victory.

Here's how the Raptors pulled it off.



Kwahi Leonard Went Off — “The Claw” became just the third player in NBA history to win a Finals MVP with two different teams (the other two are LeBron James and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar). Kwahi averaged 28.5 points per game in this series scoring 30 points in two of those games. In game 4, Leonard took over the game scoring 17 of his 36 points in the 3rd quarter. However, it was his play on the defensive end that proved that he is one of the best two-way players in NBA history.

Kwahi had help — The Warriors game-plan for this series was simple. Every time Kwahi touches the ball, they tried to double team him. This forced other players to have to score big numbers. In game one, the story of the game was Pascal Siakam scoring 32 points on 14 for 17 shooting. Game three saw Kyle Lowry and Danny Green combining for 11 three pointers. In game four, it was Serge Ibaka pouring in 20 points off the bench. And in game six, it was Fred Vanvleet scoring 22 points and hitting 5 three-pointers. He hit three in the fourth quarter. Vanvleet was a spark plug off the bench in the Finals averaging 14 points per game.

Kyle Lowry saved his best performance for last — Kyle Lowry bounced back from a poor shooting performance in game five by going off in game six dropping 26 points and 10 assists. Kyle Lowry is an elite point guard. He is a grit and grind player who didn't want this series going to a game 7. He started the game scoring his team's first 11 points.

Everyone on this team from Marc Gasol to Jeremy Lin are heroes in Canada. But the centerpiece of this team was Leonard. They ought to build a Kwahi Leonard statue in every Province in Canada.

Everyone on this team knew what their role was and executed it. You could tell in Game one that they were the better team. They ended the legendary Oracle Arena on a sour note.

If you told me before the season began that the Toronto Raptors were going to beat the Golden State Warriors in six games, and that the final game would be won on the road, I would have said you are nuts. Not with Steph, Klay, Draymond, KD. Not a chance.

But take Kevin Durant out of the equation, and now we have an intriguing series.

This was one of the most intriguing match-ups in recent memory given the health of the Warriors. Could Toronto compete against the Warriors all-star line up? Would their inexperience be a factor? What about Kwahi's teammates? Were they able to provide enough to win four games against this team?

Just as I predicted, the deciding factor in this series was KD. Even though Golden State has a lot of weapons, I didn't think they could do it without KD on the floor. "No KD, no ring." At times it looked close. And the games were competitive.

But the Toronto Raptors were the better team.

No KD No Ring.

Congratulations Canada. Well deserved.