

When Kevin Durant signed with the Golden State Warriors during the 2016 offseason, the conventional wisdom was that Klay Thompson would be the one sacrificing the most out of the team's "Big Four" (Steph Curry, Draymond Green, Durant, Thompson). Thompson responded later that summer, saying "I'm not sacrificing sh*t"

During the regular season, it's true: Thompson didn't sacrifice sh*t. Most of his 2016-2017 numbers, advanced or otherwise, were pretty much the same as they were during the 2015-2016 season. That's remarkable when you consider that the team added Durant, who very well might have won the league's MVP award this year if he didn't get injured.

This year, Thompson put up a 22p-4r-2a stat line, 47-41-85 shooting splits (FG%, 3P%, and FT%, respectively), above-average PER (17.4), and below-average defense (per Box Plus-Minus). He used 26% of possessions while he was on the floor, took 47% of his shots from three, and turned it over on 8% of his possessions (a career low by a smidge). The bulk of his damage was done coming off screens, in transition (often by floating out to the three-point line), or spotting up. This information should sound familiar because it's pretty much what he did last year too. Golden State let Klay do his thing.

However, during the playoffs so far this year, something has been a bit off. He's averaging less than 15 points per game on 39% from the field and 36% from distance, and as a result, the Warriors aren't going to him as much as they usually do (21% usage rate in the playoffs). He's also turning it over on an uncharacteristic 12% of his possessions. If a player doesn't produce, the team can find players who will – such is life on a team as stacked as the Warriors.

When players lose touches, they sometimes start to press a little bit and try to do too much. They feel the need to do as much as possible with every touch to earn back the trust of teammates and coaches, and that tendency might be exacerbated in the playoffs. There is a little bit of evidence that Thompson might be pressing.

For example, 9.7% of his possessions in the playoffs have ended in isolation, more than double his regular-season ratio of 4.2%. Isolation is not Thompson's style and it's not the team's style either. He's also taking more of his shots from the inefficient midrange (27% of FGAs, up from 19% during regular season) and fewer from downtown (40% of FGAs, down from 47% during regular season). When he has launched threes this postseason, his 36% in a relatively small sample is tolerable, but he's only knocking down 25% of his attempts from the corner, the juiciest spot on the court. Corner threes should be almost automatic for Thompson, and he shot 43% on those during the season.

It doesn't help that he's not getting open as often as he did during the regular season – 36.5% of shots have been considered unguarded, compared to 43.4% during the regular season. That might be a function of his recent increased propensity to isolate. It's obvious that Thompson is not in the rhythm that he was in during the regular season.

The least you'd hope for with a struggling shooter is that he'd at least facilitate offense through the attention that defenses must pay to him (gravity). Having someone like Thompson out on the court should, on its own, create space for other Warriors to work, almost regardless of how he's shooting on a given night. But the team scored just 93 points per 100 possessions with him on the floor this postseason, down from 111 in his regular-season minutes (for reference, the Philadelphia 76ers were last in offensive rating this season at 100.7). None of the other offense-oriented "catch-all" stats are flattering either: -0.3 win shares, -0.6 Offensive Box Plus-Minus, 8.6 PER (for reference, that PER barely beats out Tomas Satoransky's this year, and Satoransky could barely get off the Wizards bench during the playoffs; also keep in mind that the Wizards bench is really bad).

The good news for the Warriors is that while it'd be nice for Thompson to play well for them, his play is not vital for them to beat the San Antonio Spurs, especially when the Spurs are shorthanded like they are now (it's bad when David Lee leaving the game counts as a concerning development). Thompson played a decent Game 3, scoring 17 points, making half of his six threes, and posting a +15 on-off rating, but it was Durant's third-quarter spurt that ended up really being the difference in the game. Golden State probably would've won Game 3 whether Thompson played well or not.

When the Warriors face off with the Cleveland Cavaliers in the NBA Finals, however, they're going to want regular-season Klay again. LeBron James is *not* f____ing around right now, and you can be sure that he's still going to be fueled by his being snubbed from the list of MVP finalists this year. The Warriors are so good that they don't necessarily need many All-Star performances from Thompson to win the title this year, but against LeBron, you want to have as much margin for error as possible. Even just one Klay explosion during the Finals might be enough to get the Warriors over the hump, but he hasn't put together a signature performance like that yet this postseason.

Klay's team made sure that he didn't have to sacrifice sh*t during the regular season, and now it's time that he rewards the Warriors for their faith.

(all cumulative stats are from Basketball Reference or Synergy, current as of before Game 3)

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