

NBA Media Conference

Monday, December 13, 2021

New York, New York, USA

Dirk Nowitzki

Media Conference



Q. I'd like to ask you, you as an international player, what do you think about Juan Toscano-Anderson, this Mexican player who is playing his first season with a full contract, and on the other hand how is life after retirement?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, life after retirement has been great. I've been trying to travel a lot. I'm taking in a lot of family time. We're trying to -- we have three little children, so I'm basically very into their lives, and it's been a lot of fun, and trying to travel and show them different cultures.

Also, I'm learning some new stuff outside of just playing basketball, and it's been fun. I can't complain there at all.

For the player, I'm not quite 100 percent familiar. Besides the Mavs games, I haven't watched that much, I've got to be honest, of the NBA outside of the Mavs' land, so I can't really comment on that too much.

Q. My question is about your inclusion on the 75th anniversary team. What do you think of the list and what do you think about you being on the list, and how much of an achievement is it for your career?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, I'm of course incredibly honored that I was named as part of the list. As you know, it's super hard to make that list, to pick players out of a list that's basically -- had players from whatever, since the league started existing.

It's hard to compare players from different eras, so I think it was extremely tough to find 75 guys. I did a little list for myself just to see how it is and how hard it is, and it was extremely, extremely difficult.

But I'm very humbled and blessed that people would vote for me on that, and so I was very excited. I think I was very proud to be on that list with the best who have ever played in our sport and have represented the NBA. It was a very proud moment when I saw the final list.

Q. I would love to hear your thoughts on the way international players are able to be such valuable members of their franchises these days. Back when

you were drafted, people thought it was nuts to think a German guy could be a franchise player. What do you make of the way a guy like Jokić or Dončić or even some of the younger guys like Josh Giddey are starting to make their way in the NBA?

DIRK NOWITZKI: It's been incredible to watch. Honestly when I first got in the league, I think every team had maybe one international guy, and now it's numerous international guys. It's guys that have an impact, not only on their team, but they're franchise players, guys that have an impact on the communities where they come to.

Just the way basketball has grown so much over the 20 years that I've been in the league and has grown all over the world outside of the U.S., and it's been just fun to watch. Guys coming in and having a huge impact on their teams and on their communities makes me, of course, as an international player, pretty proud, and where the league has gone.

It's gone to a fun sharing-type basketball. The bigs can all shoot now, and the game has really evolved in 20 years, and I think it kind of plays into the hands of the international players that are very skilled and can make shots, and bigs can make plays off the dribble.

So the change or the style of play over the 20 years that I played showed tremendously in the amount of international players that came and played.

Q. Obviously Stephen Curry is going to break the all-time three-point record, one of the most exciting parts of the NBA's 75th anniversary season. What do you think Steph breaking the all-time record means to basketball, and who is likely to break Steph's record later on in your opinion?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, I don't think there's anybody in sight now that can break his record. I mean, the way he's been -- at the clip that he's shooting now is just fantastic and fun to watch. I mean, in a way he's changed the game. He's changed the game to where these kids now shoot from and consistently shoot way, way behind the three-point line. We have guys now pulling up just after



... when all is said, we're done.®

half court and they're open and they're letting it go, stuff that you would have never seen when I started to play.

He changed the game. He changed the game. He makes it look too easy. He's the best shooter I've ever seen, and I think it's clear he is the best catch-and-shoot player, but where he's so good is off the dribble, and I think that's something that he added, the quick three off the dribble, it's one motion, and his shot is gone.

He's so much fun to watch. I told stories before, we were in the playoffs and he's hot, and he's got me standing up and yelling at the TV, shoot, shoot. As soon as he crossed half court, I'm yelling at him for him to shoot the ball. That's how much fun he is to watch, and everybody can root for him because he's not super athletically gifted, and he's a smaller guy.

I think everybody can relate to him. He's a super nice guy. He's, of course, easy, easy to root for.

Q. I've got a question regarding your jersey retirement, and the Mavs have already announced that you will get a statue, as well. Have you seen the design, and how does it feel to have a street named after you in Dallas, have your jersey retired, and on top of all that, have your own statue in front of the American Airlines Center?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Yeah, you know me, I'm a quiet, modest sort of shy guy, and of course that is a lot of limelight for me. It's of course very humbling that when I first left Germany as sort of a 19-, 20-year old kid that over 20 years later I would have had all this stuff in Dallas, I would have said you're absolutely out of your mind, this is never going to happen. So, it was a dream. It was a dream career that worked out great for me that I could stay in one city and be part of this community for such a long time and part of this organization.

It's a dream come true that now how many people have come up to me after my career and told me that they respect and appreciate what I've done for the city, for the sport and for the organization, and of course that makes me super proud.

You know, the other day I went to a Mavs game and I take a right on Nowitzki Way. That is still surreal. It's surreal to look at that, to look at my own street, and eventually seeing the jersey under the roof and also one day, I'm not sure when, but see the statue out front. I mean, it makes me super proud of all the work, of course, I put in and how many people have helped me obviously to get to this point. I'm super excited about what's coming in the next few months and years.

Q. You played three Christmas Day games and your averages are 27.4 points, 8.0 rebounds and 3.4 assists with crazy shooting splits of 50, 50 and 93. What was it about Christmas Day games that always brought out the best in you? And second, how do you not eat too much for that Christmas Eve dinner to make you play your best for Christmas Day games?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, first of all, three is not a lot in 21 seasons, so I'm going to have to talk to the NBA why we weren't on more. But jokes aside, it's a fun time. Usually my family was in town, and I just wanted to play well, wanted to play well for my family that's in town but also for the national audience. As we know, I'm a fan. After you had your Christmas meal, you'd just sit on the couch all day and you eat and you spend time with your family and the TV is always on, and the NBA is on from basically noon to midnight.

It's a fun time, and it's a fun time for our league where lots of fans are tuning in and watching, and so I always approached it as very big games.

It's an honor to play on Christmas Day. Obviously, you've got to be one very, very good team and in a key market, so I always felt like we wanted to represent for our organization, for our team, and obviously wanted to win.

Q. Considering how many outstanding young players entered the league recently and became the face of their franchises such as Luka, I'd like to know which one you think has the highest ceiling in terms of altering the NBA's style of play like you did back then? And also a quick question, I know some NBA players are able to reproduce your one-legged fadeaway like Joel Embiid, Kevin Durant, so could you share your story on how you created that and which one you think does it better?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, I'll answer the first question first. I think Luka is, of course, for me, as the guy that's on the top of the list because he's only 22 years old. He still has so much upside and stuff to learn, and I get to basically see him every other night. His creativity, the way he reads the game, the way he spreads the ball, the way he can score really from the post all the way out to half court, there are no holes in his game. That at 22 is unbelievable.

Yeah, to me he of course has the biggest upside. But if you look at Jokić who's got an MVP season already and Giannis has back to back MVPs and championships, so I mean, there is great, great international talent in this league, of course, and representing.

But for me if we talk upside, I think Luka has the best upside out of those at age 22.

Talking about the one-legged fadeaway, that's something that I just came up as I got older. I think I've told this story before, that when you're young, you're full of energy, you drive, you get fouled and you get up and you shoot your free throws all the time. As you get older, you lose a step, you get a little slower, it's a little harder to drive and it's a lot of pounding, so I wanted to create a shot that basically gives me a little bit of room and I step back a little bit, I bump the defender off, I step back a little bit and it gives me a little separation from the defender, and in that way with using my height and my length, I can still basically shoot over anybody. So that's how it worked. I just tried to take some of the pounding away and create a shot where I could still be an efficient scorer even in my older age.

I started to shoot it more when I was just over 30, and I started to shoot a little more, and I shot it some in our championship run in 2011, and it just was working for me, and so I just kept shooting it more and more, and then it kind of became my signature shot.

Of course, other people putting it in their repertoire is a huge honor. That's great for that shot to be used, and it shows that if you're talented, if you have touch, if you have a good feel for the game that anybody can really learn how to shoot it. It's not that hard of a shot. So, I'm happy that it's in the current game.

I'd have to say obviously Kevin Durant shoots it so easy and so smooth. He's so long. He's got unbelievable touch, and he's athletic. When he shoots it, I sometimes say, yeah, this is better than the real thing. This looks amazing.

Q. The German national coach Gordon Herbert would like you to join the German National Team. Is this an option for you, and what could be your role there?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Yeah, I'm not sure. I saw that, too, in an interview, but I haven't spoken to Gordy, myself. Obviously, I've known Gordy for a long, long time. He's been in the Bundesliga for a while. He was obviously in Wurzburg for a while. But I haven't spoken to him lately since he's gotten the job, so there has been no communication whatsoever.

Of course, I'm happy to talk to him or listen what our future could look like. But you know, my network is here. I've been here for over 20 years, so my future obviously is also here in the U.S., so it's going to be hard for me to really get involved with the German Federation when I'm not there full-time.

But like I said, I'm already doing some spokesperson stuff for the European Championship next year in Cologne and Berlin and I'm happy to be involved there and I will be obviously at the Euro Championship there, so maybe we'll find a way for us to be on the same page. But for now there haven't really been any discussions about that.

Q. You played 21 years, and this is the 75th year of the NBA, which means you played almost close to a third of the league history. During that 21 years, what's the best thing that you learned about the NBA? And another question, if somebody who's not familiar with the league asked you what kind of league is the NBA, what's your answer?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, what kind of league, to me it's the best league in the world. I mean, we have some of the best athletes. The NBA has been on the forefront on a lot of issues outside of basketball and gives their athletes the platform to change their community, change the world if they want to.

I think the NBA is a very progressive league that's always on the forefront of trying to address issues. Of course the players appreciate that very much.

To me it's a league of incredibly skilled athletes, and it's the game that is so fun that any night you can see a move that you've never seen before, and it's got endless, endless possibilities. It's grown so much over my 20 years internationally, and yeah, it's been an exciting league to be a part of for so long and help it hopefully grow even more now that I'm retired.

Q. Following up on your jersey retirement night, I remember on the night that you announced your retirement, I'm sure it's still kind of a blur, but it was kind of an overwhelming experience having Charles [Barkley], all those guys there, that Mark [Cuban] surprised you, and in that moment you said to Mark, on the PA system in front of everybody, I can't wait to see what you have for my jersey retirement. How much do you know about what's going to come, and how much have you thought about what your emotions are going to be that night?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, it's going to be special, of course. That's a special evening. I'm sure they're going to surprise me with some stuff. I do know, of course, who's sort of coming because obviously some people are coming from Germany and from FIBA. Some of my sponsors in Germany are coming, some of my friends, my family will be here already for Christmas. It's a big list, so I was obviously -- I would say the broad spectrum of it, and I have a bird's view, but I'm sure there will be some great,

great stuff happening and some great surprises, which I don't even want to know before.

Of course, they're making a video. I don't even want to know who's all in the video and who's finally then ending up showing up. I want to keep it that way. I want to be of course surprised that night and be emotional and have an unbelievable experience like I had at 41-21-1 once. Like I said, I have a bird's eye view and an understanding sort of how the ceremony is going to be structured and who's going to talk when, so that's pretty much how I want to keep it at.

It's going to be overwhelming. I am not super emotional off the court, but at stuff like that I tend to get a little emotional, like at the street naming where it took me a couple minutes to get going there. I'm sure it will be overwhelming.

But it's going to be so much fun to see everybody, and hopefully everybody can come that's been part of my career for such a long time and has helped me somewhere down the line. It's going to be a night of me being extremely grateful to everybody who's been part of my career.

Q. How are you seeing your Dallas Mavericks this beginning of the season, and what about Luka Dončić? A lot of minutes he's playing in the team.

DIRK NOWITZKI: Yeah, I think we started off the season really well. I think what threw us back a little bit was some of the injury problems. I think it was first Porzingis missed, what, six, seven games with some back issues. Then he came back, started playing really, really well, then Luka rolled his ankle and I think he missed three or four games.

I just think that right when we try to hit our stride, we haven't really been healthy. I think it showed if one guy of our best two is out we struggle to compete on both ends, and sometimes we lose, unfortunately games we should win. But if we're all healthy and KP and Luka are both playing, I think we're a very good team, so we just hopefully going forward, once Luka comes back now from his injury now, that we can stay healthy and make a good run.

The good thing is it's still early in December. There's lots of basketball to be played still, so we're hoping that we're going to have a good run, but a good season always has ups and downs, so hopefully we're over the worst and we can look forward and have a good run here going into the new year.

Injuries unfortunately are a part of the sport and part of the season. We just have to hold it down if one guy is hurt and

hopefully still win some games and stay on track. But our goal has always been, of course, make the Playoffs, hopefully get home-court advantage in the first round, which will be tough to do in a tough Western Conference.

But we'll see how the rest of this season unfolds, but like I said, if we stay healthy and we start shooting the ball a little bit better -- I think we've been struggling from three a little bit for whatever reason I'm not sure of, but if Luka drives and kicks the ball out to his shooters, we of course need to step in and make those shots to really be competitive down the stretch.

Q. Except for Steph Curry and Udonis Haslem, among active players, no one has completed 10 seasons for the only team they played for, and as someone who played 21 seasons with the Mavericks alone, it's a record. Can you tell us why it's so rare these days, and did you ever want to play for another team, especially during the lean years of the Mavericks? I think the fiercest rivalry that you played in your prime was against the Spurs and your one-on-one rivalry against Tim Duncan in those games was unmatched. Do you feel you reserved your best for those games against the Spurs? Do you agree, and why were those games so fiercely competitive for you?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, you know, I'll start with the second question first. The Spurs were a rival. When I first got in the league, they were always the best team in Texas, always the team to beat, and they were always sort of our big brother that beat the little brother down and kept us down. But we of course with Steve [Nash] and Mike Finley, we tried to break through. We tried to break through and beat the big brother, and there was sort of a way we developed a little rivalry there.

There was a couple years where we played them almost it felt like every year in the Playoffs, and they were so good and a well-coached and a great fan base, the atmosphere down there in the arena was always full, so it was just a great atmosphere to play in against one of the best coaches our league has ever had and some of the great players. It was just a great atmosphere to play in.

One of my greatest wins or victories in my career is still Game 7, '06 [Western Conference] Finals when we beat the Spurs on their home court in the Playoffs in overtime down the stretch. I mean, that's a memory, when I drove and had the and-one to send it to overtime, that's a memory I'll never forget for the rest of my life. Of course, we didn't win the championship that year, which was super frustrating, but that memory of beating the Spurs in Game 7 will always stick with me. That was an amazing, amazing accomplishment.

I think the first part of the question was why don't guys stay longer for their teams. I think the times have changed a little bit. Of course, the NBA is also a big business. Everybody has a platform. Everybody has a brand these days. Everybody has to find the best solution for them, what works for them, what's best for the family, what market do they want to play in.

I'm more old school. I was strictly focused on basketball, and I wanted to make it work here in Dallas. When I first got here and Mark bought the team, we got really close, and he was always loyal to me. He made me his franchise player, and so I always -- the fans were incredibly loyal to me and wanted me to succeed.

It was easy for me to stay here and be a Mavericks fan, a Mavericks player for life.

I never really thought about leaving. The only reason I would have left is maybe if we wouldn't have won a championship, and then at the end of my career I might have chased it somewhere or go ring chasing, I'm not sure if it would have gotten that far, but I'm glad of course in 2011 we were able to bring a championship here to Dallas, and I never had to go somewhere else to chase a ring.

It worked out perfect the way everything went, and I'm happy that I was here for 21 years representing a great organization and a great city.

Q. I want to go back real quick, you had been talking about trying to put together at 75th Anniversary Team for yourself and kind of had difficulty. What did you emphasize when you were putting that together? When I talk to some of the former players, they tend to emphasize other things than us fans and the media tend to emphasize. For example, we love championships but you guys love scoring ability or athleticism and things like that. When you were putting together your team, what did you really emphasize over other things?

DIRK NOWITZKI: You know what, I tried to look at the whole picture. I cannot -- let's take Patrick Ewing or Charles Barkley. I can't fault these guys for not winning a championship. They were unbelievable players that happened to run into Michael Jordan every year in the '90s. That is not just one category I focus on. It was just their all-around package, their body of work, their averages, their shooting percentages.

I kind of looked at -- tried to incorporate everything in the whole discussion, and for me I made it actually really hard on myself, I started from scratch, and then I started listing

whoever came to my mind first and then went all the way down. I must have spent at least three evenings, probably two or three hours on it, so in total way more time than I should have. But first of all, I liked doing it because it kind of gave me a time to really reflect on players that played before me and I might have not actually grew up watching as much, so it gave me time to actually research them and learn more about some of those players and appreciate them more in a way.

Going back looking at it, I should have probably just taken the top 50 and just wrote them set and just find another 25 players, but I literally went through every, every player and did my homework there, and I really liked it. It was fun for me, let's just say that. I think I'm happy with my list. There is a few things that I had different. Of course, I'm not going to name names that I had differently than the original list, but I had a few on that ended up not making it.

But like I said, it's so tough comparing players from different eras, and the game is changing along the way. You know, guys' numbers in the '80s and '90s might not have been as good as somebody later, but then people were like, the hand check is gone, it's easier to score 30 now than it was to score 20 in the '80s and '90s. It's just a lot of things that go through your mind, and you try to incorporate into your decision. But it was hard, and I took it hard, and it was fun.

Q. Did you rank them 1 to 75 or rank them as whatever, the 75 best?

DIRK NOWITZKI: No, I just ranked them whatever came to my mind. Of course, Michael Jordan will forever be my GOAT, so I had my first, but other than that, I kind of went with whoever came to my mind. It was kind of all mixing and matching eras.

Not really ranking them by what I thought 1 through 75.

Q. So I won't ask where you put yourself.

DIRK NOWITZKI: I didn't actually put myself on the list.

Q. Come on, man. Very humble of you.

DIRK NOWITZKI: That was one requirement, you cannot put yourself on the list, so I didn't.

Q. When you were going through your NBA 75 list, if you had to put together an all-time starting five of international guys, who would make that starting five for you?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, you know, that's super hard.

There's been some great, great players before me, and now obviously great players after me. I was a big fan of [Arvydas] Sabonis and Dražen Petrović and got to know Toni Kukoč a little bit while we still played against each other, and [Detlef] Schrempf would have been on my list because I grew up in Germany watching his career pretty closely. He was a tremendous player.

There were lots of great players before me, and then I played even with Peja Stojaković, who to me is not only one of the greatest shooters internationally but of all time. His stroke was so good, and I got to witness it every day firsthand in practice playing with him. Tony Parker, of course, comes to mind, as a great, great point guard and where he came from and developed into was just fantastic.

Now we have all these players with Giannis and Luka and Jokic who's the league MVP. I mean, it's kind of tough to pick out five there. I'm probably leaving out names just as we speak here, but those are just the ones that of course come to your mind right away.

It's been an incredible amount of international players that have changed the game, changed the league, changed their franchises, and it's been a pleasure for me to watch.

Q. What was the key to stopping LeBron James in the Finals of 2011?

DIRK NOWITZKI: Well, I think we were a little fortunate. I think he just went to Miami at the time, and I don't think they fully had all the roles defined, and I think everybody was still trying to find their way with [Chris] Bosh and [Dwyane] Wade and who scores when, who gets the ball at certain times of the game.

I think we were really fortunate that we saw them in year one. I think we would all agree on this call that they were way more talented than we were at the time.

What we did well is we were a good group. We were an older team that wanted to play, wanted to win, and we kind of had our defined roles.

I got the ball when it was close and we needed some scoring. We had our good defenders. We had J-Kidd who was kind of calling the game and making the passes. So, we had very defined roles, and we knew what time everybody had to step up, and our defense was really good that way with Tyson [Chandler] and J-Kidd and Shawn Marion was huge.

Really what we tried with LeBron is what you would try with any great players, and that's mixing it up, sometimes trapping, sometimes go under the pick-and-roll, sometimes

hedge a little harder on the pick-and-roll, just keep mixing it up, keep mixing up the guys who were on him. We had J-Kidd on him, I'm sure we had Shawn Marion on him a while, we had DeShawn Stevenson I'm sure on him. Just trying to mix it up and never give a great player the same look.

Like I said, it helped they were still trying to find their ways within the team and that we saw them in year one after they formed that super team.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks again, Dirk, and thanks to everyone for joining.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports