

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Thursday, June 6, 2024

Dallas Mavericks

Kyrie Irving

Game 1: Postgame



Boston Celtics 107, Dallas Mavericks 89

Q. Share with us, what's your feeling right now, just your thoughts mentally, how do you get yourself geared up for Game 2.

KYRIE IRVING: Just grateful for the experience to get through Game 1. You know, just a lot of emotions going into it. Just waiting for the opportunity to get out there and compete. You know, going against a great Celtics team. We just have to get this one out of the way.

We didn't perform the way we would have wanted to tonight. It starts with me just being able to get out there and get us settled. Got to take some accountability for just the communication, and just going out there and getting used to the way that the kind of environment was going to be.

But I think my teammates did a great job of staying together, sticking to the game plan. We obviously made some mistakes, like I said, but we gave ourselves a chance in the second half and we just have to continue to do the right things and win the quarters as much as we can.

They came out and hit us in the mouth early. Got the home crowd going into it. Down 17 in the first quarter. It's not really like us to give up 37 points. It's happened to us before in the playoffs, but we just wanted to make it a lot tougher on them. They hit a lot of threes.

Again, when you get them rolling like that, they play a very easy game the rest of the game, and we've just got to hit them in the mouth a little bit.

They did their job getting Game 1, but we are going to take our lessons and get ready for a good Game 2.

Q. You and Luka, two of the best one-on-one players in the world. The ball wasn't moving tonight. How do you avoid with the way the Celtics play defensively falling into the trap of isolation and becoming

stagnant?

KYRIE IRVING: I don't necessarily agree it's a trap they want to set us. I think that they really rely on their great defensive ball pressure and one-on-one defenders. They funnel us into certain areas. Even as I say that, they are relying on the one-on-one, every time I got an iso, there's almost two, three people waiting for me to get in there. I have to catch the ball on a live dribble and just be aware of my opportunities.

It's uncharacteristic for us to have only nine assists. The ball has got to move a little bit more. And again, that starts with me just being able to push the pace, get us some easy opportunities, and just adjust to what they are throwing at us.

It's a fun series. It was fun going into the game. It's still going to be fun. But there's going to be a level of chess that still has to be played. And Game 1 was just about adjustments. We obviously wanted to win this basketball game. Gave ourselves a chance in the second half when we were down by eight, and they brought it up to 16 and they got it up to 22 and we called a timeout.

So just going to be replaying some of these possessions. But at the same time, looking at some of the positives that we can carry on to Game 2.

Q. You mentioned the environment. How did that either meet or exceed your expectations and how did it affect you tonight?

KYRIE IRVING: It's basketball at the end of the day. You know, being in this environment, I'm used to it at this point. Early in my career, there was a different relationship that I had with Boston and just being able to come here, be settled with a veteran group. Now I'm here as a veteran, over the past few years, just experiencing the playoffs here, even regular season, it's been the same thing.

I thought it was going to be a little louder in here but I'm expecting the same things going into Game 2. Crowd trying to get me out of my element, my teammates out of my element.



But again, the energy has to be focused towards the game. I felt like I had a lot of great looks. They hit back rim or were just a little left or right. Just got to stay confident and stay poised throughout this, man. This is the best time of the year to be playing. There's only two teams left. Let's put it in perspective.

The environment is going to be what it is but my focus is on our game plan and making sure my guys feel confident and I feel confident and continue to shoot great shots.

Q. I heard you mention two things tonight. One, you're grateful for the moment, and that the young guys did well. When you see them embrace this moment, not being on this stage before, not the outcome you guys wanted but what was that moment like for you seeing them rise to the occasion?

KYRIE IRVING: Very proud of them and amazed at how poised they are. This younger generation has a quiet confidence and a knowing about themselves. I think when we hit a little adversity, we have to know how to respond as a group and as a team. We talked about it in a lot of huddles but we have to act on it.

That's what this game is about is controlling our actions, making sure that we stay positive, but also know what we are going up against, the competition level. We are the best in the world at this point. There are only two teams left. We have proven why we deserve to be here and we've earned our right to be here. It's no time to see ourselves as a short opponent or someone that's not capable of coming out of this.

It's Game 1, but at the same time, we've got two days in between. So there's going to be a lot of noise and a lot of who played well, who didn't play well, who was under pressure. Just telling my guys, now is not the time to fall into that and be divided and be on social media all day listening to people that are not on the court with us. No disrespect to anybody but we are the players out there and we have to control what we can control and be ready to put on for each other.

Q. You guys defensively have been so good in the playoffs, tonight seemed like you were a step slow on the rotations the way they were moving the ball. How do you improve on that?

KYRIE IRVING: Just settle in emotionally and just continue to pinpoint the things that were working for us where we are funneling their guys to where we want them to go and offensively playing off a live catch. They do a good job of loading up when we are on the dribble. They do a lot of reaching, a lot of verticality, effort. We have to

give them credit. We are going against a great team and now is the time to just look at film, spend the next two days healing up and just getting ready for a physical Game 2.

Q. You guys outscored them in the third and fourth quarter. How do you take that into Game 2 and what did you guys do in particular to get the score back to eight points in the third quarter?

KYRIE IRVING: Again, just look at film and then also be ready to wash our hands of what this game was and how we didn't rise to the occasion to start off the game. Just be able to battle with them during those runs.

They are going to make some threes at times but we want to make them tough. When they are at home, they shoot incredibly well. We knew what we were getting ourselves into but until we experience it, then we wouldn't know.

This is the first time this group is experiencing the Finals. We don't want to use that as an excuse. We want to use that as a strength. We want to use that energy that we have of just going into it and playing our game to our advantage, and then, you know, we'll see how the chess pieces fall in.

Q. Obviously during the playoffs, you've lost Game 1 before. You've come back very, very strong. You yourself have been part of the greatest NBA Finals comeback of all time. I sense a lot of calmness and peace with you up on the stage here. How do you spread that message to your teammates that it's just Game 1, we've been through this before, and as a leader, kind of get them in the right frame of mind for Game 2?

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, it's not the first time I've lost in Boston. I don't want to continue to make it a habit but they've had a few games over me and they have our number -- not our number, I don't want to say our number but the past few teams I've been on, they have had my number a little bit. You have to give credit to a good team. They have been good the past three or four years.

We want to show them respect but at the same time we want to bring our best game. We have to play four of our greatest games in order to win the series and in order to win the Finals. It's not about holding our heads up for one game if we didn't play well. It's the first to four and we obviously know that, but we have to play four complete games, four of our best games, and then we'll see where we stand after that.

But in the meantime, we've got to look ourselves in the mirror and it starts with me as one of the leaders on the

team, how can I be better and how can I be more poised in this environment. It's not the booing and it's not the missed shots. It's more or less our attitude and how we approach possession by possession. Our identity has been made on the defensive end. We have proven that.

I have not had the best games offensively this playoff run but we have been able to get stops, timely stops and been able to pick each other up on the offensive end. We have all-world talent on this team, skillset is out of this roof, but now it's just about remaining confident and always knowing that you have somebody that's been through it but now it's our turn to go through it together. You know, this is what makes it exciting.

Q. Somewhat similar question to the one that you just answered. When you guys went down 0-1 twice already in this postseason run, do you remember what the next day felt like, and clearly why that it worked in both of those series?

KYRIE IRVING: I mean, yeah, it's hard to compare just because you're going against different players, different series.

But I will say that the next day was pretty cool, you know, because to see us still joined together in practice, still go through our day-to-day routines and rituals, and just hold each other up and hold each other accountable but in a very healthy way. We are very honest about what we can continue to do better and then we are very honest about how we can coach one another to be better.

We are going to hear the familiar sentiment or familiar phrase that a lot of guys haven't experienced the Finals on our team, and that's okay. Experience is the best teacher, and once you get Game 1 out of the way or Game 2 out of the way you start feeling better about the series.

But when you lose Game 1, there is a level of disappointment. We are human. I've always said that. We are going to feel the natural emotions. You feel the highs and lows of the journey but when you lose a game like this especially in the Finals where everyone is watching, it's going to hit you a little bit.

But again, like I say, now is the time to not get on social media and not pay attention to what you guys are saying, no disrespect, but we've got to go out there and just focus on what we can control.

I just know how the next two days are going to go. It's going to be very loud. It's going to be very chaotic at times. People are going to have words to say about how we can be better and how we can win or lose the series.

Again, it's about us focusing on what we can control in that locker room, and we have great leaders in that locker room. So it's not just me who has that the experience that I'm going to be leaning on. I'm going to be leaning on everybody to help me out, too, as I help them.

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