

# NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Saturday, June 8, 2024

Dallas Mavericks

Kyrie Irving

Practice Day



**Q. What do you say to the Mavs fans who panicked after Game 1, getting ready for Game 2?**

KYRIE IRVING: It's not the first time. It's not the first time we've heard that Dallas fans are panicking. Shout-out to our fans. We appreciate your support all year. Just stay poised, man. Stay focused on the goal. This mission is bigger than us.

**Q. You've been part of multiple star duos. How does the debate about who is the best player on the team affect the team?**

KYRIE IRVING: You said how does it?

**Q. Debate, discussion, about whose team is this, who is the best player on the team, how does that affect the team, as part of a star tandem? How do you handle that?**

KYRIE IRVING: By doing your best not to pay attention to it because a lot of people don't know what they are talking about, and specifically if you've never played that position or been on a team at that level where you have to go through it yourself, and I know that we have people that appreciate the game of basketball that speak on it.

But at the same time, it's an everyday thing when you're on the team with, you know, other guys that add value to the team. They have skill sets; they work on their game and they want to be appreciated, too. I do my best to nonchalantly push that conversation to the side of 1A, 1B or whose team is it, this, that.

I'm just here to play basketball. It's a dream come true to be at this level. I've had to work extremely hard. I've been a winner my whole entire life. I've obviously had some failures and loss but done a lot more winning. Used to it. In order to be on that type of frequency or that goal, you've got to be selfless in your approach.

Obviously you're not going to get it right all the time, but as

a teammate, you just want to push those other things to the side that don't really matter or get you better as a team. So we just leave it to everybody else to argue whose team it is and who has the most responsibility. It's all our jobs to be prepared. S----y conversation, but it has to happen in sports.

**Q. You said after Game 1, "I've got to be better, we've got to be better." What's the key to having a great bounce-back game for the team and for you personally?**

KYRIE IRVING: Just by paying attention to how we prepare and also just adjustments. Sticking to the game plan.

**Q. With so many people talking about the energy that the team came out with the other day, is it energy in execution? Or what is the secret sauce for Game 2?**

KYRIE IRVING: Secret sauce? What do you mean?

**Q. What adjustments do you think you have to make for Game 2?**

KYRIE IRVING: I mean it was our first time being together as a group in this Finals stage. Experience is the best teacher at times when you don't know what to expect.

Going out there, TD Garden, playing against the Boston Celtics, who are having a historic season. We knew they were going to come out with a lot of verve, a lot of energy. And they have been doing it all year. They have been consistent on their end. I think it's pretty easy to say we can focus on our end and pay attention to what we can control.

But it's a little bit deeper than that. Just got to calm our nerves, poise our nerves a little bit and just be aware of the environment we are in. It's going to be high intense from who we are going against. It's going to be very physical. Some things are going to be called and some things aren't.

I think we got all that experience in Game 1, and we are looking forward to the challenge in Game 2 to play better and being who we have been since post-All-Star Break and

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just having fun in doing it. This is the highest level of basketball right now. We are the only two teams playing. We are proud of ourselves but we are not satisfied. We've just got to continue to be ourselves.

**Q. Curious what Coach Kidd is like in the moment when is you're trailing big in Game 1? He was telling you guys to have fun out there?**

KYRIE IRVING: He was reiterating the same things I'm saying, probably a little bit more simple. But he's been giving us a lot of peace of mind, especially when we are out there, high-intense environment, like I said. Just got to play better.

**Q. How have you learned in that environment to handle it? Is it better to just ignore it? Do you engage with particular fans? How did that play out in Game 1 as you have been in this environment multiple times now?**

KYRIE IRVING: By realizing that I've been in this league for 13 years, and I've been playing against the Celtics for quite a few years and I have quite a few playoff series against them, whether wins or losses.

So I just try to be aware that this is a new space that I'm in as one of the leaders of the team and with the new group, and giving them that peace of mind, like I said, when things get tough. We are going against a very historic team in the Boston Celtics, but we're a great team too. We have to remember that.

And engaging with fans here in Boston is always fun. Like I said last week, it's something I'll turn the page over on, too, but people continue to ask me about it and what I think about it, which is cool, too.

But yeah, this is what makes sports fun. This is what makes the stories fun. Getting a chance to go against a giant like this, whether it be just talking about the team or talking about the environment and the fans and how crazy it can get. This is what I imagine it being like, getting to this stage again, earning our way to be here with my teammates and being able to put our best foot forward going against the best of the best. That's everything you dream of. Everything else is extracurricular.

**Q. I feel like during your time with Dallas, why you've had the success you've had is that you've been able to focus on basketball. In this series with so much hoopla surrounding your former time with the Celtics -- there's blowup dolls of you outside the arena, there's a lot of things going on --**

KYRIE IRVING: What else is there?

**Q. Some things I probably can't get into right now. But I'm wondering from your perspective, because I don't know if everybody made a big deal of the Shamrock on your pants at shoot-around earlier this week, and I don't know if there was actually anything to that or not, but you made the comment postgame the other night you thought it would be louder around here. Has this been the hardest moment for you to laser focus on basketball because there is so much other stuff going on?**

KYRIE IRVING: No. Not really. Again, I've been able to grow over the past few years to put basketball in perspective. This is an incredible experience that I get to live out for quite a few years of my life. I'm going to learn a lot of lessons that I'm going to apply to life after this. I failed miserably while also not knowing how to compartmentalize or accept the emotions that come with failure, and also being on the successful side, didn't know how to handle that either.

So the past few years have been about that growth perspective for me and learning how to handle myself in situations and circumstances that are going to be more beneficial for me to learn now than learning it when I'm 38 years old, and I'm looking back at my career, and I don't even know how to celebrate that.

I don't expect to be celebrated by everybody. I'm going to, you know, still be aware that a lot of people want to see me fail. But again, I think I pay attention more to the way that I'm celebrated from people that love me unconditionally and I go home and have a peace of mind.

You know, thinking about my time in Boston, I could go down a myriad of things that none of you in here know that I was dealing with, and I don't think a lot of people would care. I think a few people would care and want to hear about it, and I would leave that space open in the future if you ever want to hear about it.

But putting into perspective the blowup dolls and remarks that are getting said, that's basketball. When I leave out of here and I walk around Boston, I don't hear a lot of the things that I hear when I'm playing on the court. There's a lot of mutual respect. There's a lot of eye-to-eye communication that's built on just being human, and they appreciate the things I do off the floor, as well.

So there are a lot of Celtics fans out there that still love me, too, surprising to everybody. But when I'm on the street walking around, which I do, you know, it's a lot of love. I get a lot of embrace. I take pictures. My dad is here, he

played at Boston University. So there has to be a respect there because if anything happens to my family while I'm here, then it goes way beyond the game, you know.

And I don't forget things either. Somebody threw something at me while I was here. I've heard it all. Nobody asked me how I felt after that and why it could be a little bit of a traumatic response when I'm back in this environment after somebody does something like that.

You know, so things have changed since then. I've been able to accept what I cannot change but also change the way that I look at things to be more positive.

So this is fun for me, man. This is healthy. I'm glad that I can be up here on this stage speaking authentically and then also go home and be at peace.

**Q. When it's you, Jason and Luka talking basketball, how different is it when people who don't have that same collective experience and see things the way you guys see the game, how unique, different and enjoyable is that?**

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, teaching is fun. Being a student is even more fun. So when you're in a film session with J-Kidd or Coach [Sean] Sweeney or even Luka, myself, and the rest of our guys, there's a lot of honest communication going on. Just what we see. And we always make sure that we are aware that -- we're a new group in this environment, too. So give ourselves some grace and patience and be ready to play our best game every day and prepare.

The things we see out there, we have to talk about it. Some of the cues that you would normally have when you make it to this level, we are still developing, and that's okay.

So as we look to become an even better team, a greater team through this experience, this is what's needed is just that honest communication.

**Q. I was wondering how you managed to stay locked in this deep into the season and take care of your body, and how do you train in order to get to this point in the season? Because after my rookie year, I learned. We haven't been playing for like a month and a half, and you guys are still going like every day. So I was just wondering how you're able to take care of your body and how you train for that?**

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, I would start off with this. So, try not to get FOMO as best you can just because you're so used to playing every single day, working out every single

day towards a goal, and now that that goal isn't necessarily there to win the Championship, you have to set other goals, and that comes from a personal standpoint. You know, what do you want to accomplish bringing into next season, it starts now while no one is watching and while it's just you by yourself or your brother or you're playing five-on-five.

Just working on the things that everyone said that you were not great at or you could not do or that you see within yourself that you need to improve.

Because you're seeing how hard it is to get here and how long you have to stay locked in, as you said. So I've been able to find some peace of mind throughout this journey, throughout this year, of just making this phrase, like our team bonding thing, like just peaking at the right time.

Some teams peak really early, some teams peak in the middle of the season, and some teams start peaking at the end. Some teams get into the playoffs or get deep into the playoffs and they peak.

It just depends where you are as a team and your understanding of what you're doing, and also appreciating all the hard work it took to get here. A lot of our peers are watching and trying to get back to where we are, get here.

So we have to be aware that the hunger is going to be more next year, but we are also going to be hungry, too, to show why we are one of the best in the world. Two teams left. Dream come true as a kid to be in a Final, see the court change a little bit, see all the stickers, see the 600 media members and credentials we get. It can be a lot, but it's also something you want to appreciate because you never know when you're going to get back.

Take your time, but also work your tail off right now because I know I'm going to have to get ready for you guys next season.

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