

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Boston Celtics

Coach Joe Mazzulla

Practice Day



That's really it.

Q. Coach, I want to talk with you about Jayson Tatum. He already scored 50 points in a playoff game, and he's capable of doing that at any time. In the first game, Porzingis said what he did was only because of Jayson Tatum, and they said the same thing Game 2. Do you think we are watching the best version of Jayson Tatum in these Finals?

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, I think it's pretty close. I think because of the type of player that he is, it's always going to look different because of his versatility.

You live in America or Brazil?

Q. Brazil.

JOE MAZZULLA: That's probably why you asked that question. None of the American ones did. They look at the lens differently of basketball. In America, nothing is ever good enough. It's about what can you do for me right now. It's not always the case in that situation.

Yes, I think we are. I think he's only going to get better. He makes greatness look easy because of his ability to impact the game in many different ways. He's going to continue to get better and better and better. It's an honor to coach him.

Q. You put out a very long release about Kristaps, who has the issue with his left leg. Looked like he tweaked his right leg. What is the procedure for the next 24 hours? Getting treatment, see where he's at?

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, I mean, listen, he's doing anything and everything he can to be ready for the game tomorrow. It's a serious injury. At the end of the day, our team and the medical team is not going to put him in any bad situations.

We've taken the decision to play out of his hands because the importance of him. He's going to do everything can he to play. We're going to leave it up to our medical team.

Q. Jalen has talked a lot this year about the pride he's put into playing at the defensive end, taking on big challenges. Spent a lot of time on Luka in the series. His teammates talked about the way he's approached that. How have you seen him over the past couple years grow at that end of the court? How important is it to have him picking up Luka, still being able to give you a lot at the other end?

JOE MAZZULLA: I think the growth of him as a player has been, like, not being defined by one thing. When you have your superstar players knowing what it takes to win, they're willing to take that on. Sometimes it's scoring. Sometimes it's defense. Sometimes it's rebounding, passing, executing.

I think one of the major growths of Jalen's game is he'll do whatever it takes to win. That could change each game. That could change each series. He's doing that.

Q. Sunday is Father's Day. What would your dad say to you, two games away from winning a championship? And talk about how your faith has guided you throughout these past couple years, how you lean on it to coach.

JOE MAZZULLA: What he would say? He would say, Focus on the details, focus on the fundamentals. The closer you are to winning, the easier it is to become distracted by things that you can't control, things that don't matter. Here are the things that matter, and you got to fight like hell to accomplish those things with simplicity, with discipline and mental toughness.

Everything he talked about was about your mindset and your mental toughness. That's what separates you.

Thank you for asking the second question. I think it's the most important thing. I think the ability to handle the ebbs and flows, the humility to understand there's a plan that's much bigger than who you are individually. Have an impact on other people. Then using the gifts God has given you to try to impact people.



It's my anchor, the most important thing. I've enjoyed the challenge of trying to stick with that even when it's difficult at times.

Q. Kyrie obviously hasn't scored with the efficiency that we're used to seeing. The job you did defensively, how do you evaluate that?

JOE MAZZULLA: I think he's missed some easy shots. I expect him obviously to be even more aggressive and to fight to get those shots.

The most important thing is just being detailed in individual defense. It's not about shutting him down. It's about just making it difficult for him because of his ability to impact plays.

So we just have to fight for that. He's gotten some good looks. I think we have to guard him better. He's definitely going to be more aggressive. We have to be better at individual defense. We have to be better at our team defense. We have to be better at our details.

Q. Curious about when you watch players from afar, then you actually coach them. What have you learned and enjoyed the most about Jrue Holiday that you saw from afar, and what have you found out now?

JOE MAZZULLA: I think the biggest thing is when you get someone and you realize that everything everybody says about them is true, that's probably one of the ultimate compliments you can get. Your character is what it is. It's what you say it is, what other people say it is. I'd say that.

Everything everyone said about him when we first got him, it's been even better. Just the type of person that he is. His humility, his competitive nature, the way he treats his family, the way he treats his teammates, how hard he plays, his willingness to do everything.

Q. Did you see what happened when Kristaps got hurt in the second half? What was the communication like with him over the last day?

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, I didn't see it. It is out of his hands. It's his job to fight like hell to put himself in the best possible position to feel as good as he can. We're not going to let him compromise himself.

That's been it. To say, We need you, do everything you can, but at the end of the day we got your back and make sure we put you in the best position possible.

Q. How likely is it he'll go tomorrow?

JOE MAZZULLA: I have no idea.

Q. I heard you talk about how you want guys taking certain shots, good spacing in transition. Tatum sometimes gets criticized for taking pull-up threes. There was one where it turned into a Jrue Holiday rebound. Is that sort of an example of what you're looking for in those positions, take the good shot, don't risk it?

JOE MAZZULLA: Criticism is the ultimate beauty. It's a sign of ultimate respect. It's just a beautiful thing. I really love the way Jayson has handled that. It's just a testament to who he is.

Shot selection is all about timing. It just depends on the time and score, depends on the spacing, the type of play we ran to get the shot that we want.

Nobody knows what's a good shot and what's not except the people in our locker room, because those are the ones that we talk about every single day. We know how important shot selection is. I think the greatest strength of our team is they fight to take the right shot every single time down the floor. They know what a right shot is. They know the importance of how the shot will impact your defense. It will impact or offense.

On that particular shot, that was a good shot because we were in offensive rebounding position, the floor was balanced, we had the matchup that we wanted. It allowed us to do both: to offensive rebound and get back in transition.

I think you just try to learn, try to look at different lenses. I think everybody tries to look at the game the same way. The more you can look at it from a completely different spectrum, it allows you to build connections. It allows you to really focus on where games are really won and lost, and not on the stuff that's easy to notice.

I think everyone notices the easy things. It's can you fight to notice the things other people aren't, because you know that's where winning and losing is, is in that space.

Q. Sam Hauser said he noticed that you kind of cited killer whales, how they handle their prey. You also said orcas are your favorite animal. Can you elaborate?

JOE MAZZULLA: Try to use different things to keep the guys engaged. It's a long year. If you keep talking to them about game plans, it gets stagnant.

You try to build connections. You figure out what's one

thing that can grab the guys' attention for an extra 10 seconds, something outside of basketball that you think can hammer home a point.

At the end of the day, that's the most important thing, is making sure you get through to your guys so they listen.

Q. What kind of bond have you established with Jrue? You guys are more like peers, close to the same age, the sharing of faith. What have you learned from him? Did you have any relationship at all before he got here?

JOE MAZZULLA: I try to be like peers with all of our guys. The age gap is relatively there. I try to have a peer-like relationship with all of them.

Then with each guy it's different, because you can break down different barriers -- who is married, who has kids, whose faith is important. Sometimes it's not for people. So you connect differently.

I've always had an interesting relationship with Jrue because we share the same app, the Hallow app. Before I met him, he was actually on there. I would listen to his prayers. I got to know his heart. Then I coached him in the All-Star Game. I always had this spiritual connection that we would end up in the same area at some point.

I kind of felt like I knew him before I knew him just because of the way he prays, and I knew his heart.

Our relationship now is -- sometimes we talk to each other, sometimes we don't. Sometimes we just give a head nod. Sometimes I see his wife, I give them a hug; sees my wife, give them a hug. That's it.

I got a question (for a Brazilian reporter). Who do you think has the hardest adjustment to the media and the criticism? Because, like, the lens with which Brazilian soccer players are looked at is similar to how American athletes are looked at. You look at where Neymar has been over his time, taking on the No. 10, No. 9. Who do you think has dealt with the most? How do you think they've handled it? I feel like playing for the Celtics, representing the country of Brazil for its national soccer team, and now you see Endrick coming up, how do you think that's handled in your country?

BRAZILIAN REPORTER: You're talking about football, okay. I just want to see if I got you right. I think Neymar has handled the most pressure lately. But because we had a lack of idols most recently. If you are back in 2002, we had Ronaldo, had Rivaldo. We had a great national team. This talent has gone down for the years. Neymar has

surged like a huge talent. We put a lot of expectations on him that he can deliver to us another World Cup. I don't think it's pretty fair to him what we did.

JOE MAZZULLA: I agree. I would say the same thing for Tatum. Also, he's the first No. 10 to take on the weight of Brazil since the social media era. Who before Neymar was involved in that social media area? He's so good, everything you can do can be taken for granted. When he won the gold medal by making the game-winning penalty kick, you would have thought that would have solidified it. It hasn't.

You ask an interesting question because I think the guys we're around share in that same burden of having to handle the responsibility that they have to move forward for what they do. It's an ultimate gift. I agree it's probably Neymar, right?

BRAZILIAN REPORTER: Most recently, yes. I have a particular opinion, but I have to see the general thing about it, about Neymar. I don't agree of a lot of his actions outside the field.

JOE MAZZULLA: I don't know him. All I know is the soccer player.

BRAZILIAN REPORTER: We should just focus on the soccer player. I don't think that's fair.

JOE MAZZULLA: Don't get me into the coaches. I mean, don't get me into the football coaches, right? That's like an impossible job.

BRAZILIAN REPORTER: It's a lot of pressure. It's a huge country. We love football, we love soccer. It's our sport. We were always good at it. It's a lot of pressure.

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah.

BRAZILIAN REPORTER: Most recently the results were so bad that the pressure is just rising.

JOE MAZZULLA: I study that a lot because I think we're in a similar environment here as to how to handle all of that.

BRAZILIAN REPORTER: Boston Celtics, probably just from the basketball, as great as the national soccer team. Pretty much the same.

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah.

BRAZILIAN REPORTER: I know you love soccer.

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah.

BRAZILIAN REPORTER: I know you like (Pep) Guardiola,
and I know you stole some things from his thoughts.

JOE MAZZULLA: None of us are that good. We steal
from everybody.

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