

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

Boston Celtics

Coach Joe Mazzulla

Game 3: Pregame

Q. Joe, can you share any lasting memories of Jerry West in your time in West Virginia, just what he means to the state, to the game, to you?

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, it's tough to lose him. Obviously praying for Karen, Jonnie, Ryan, the rest of their family.

My junior year in college, wasn't living up to anyone's standards. I got a call. It's Jerry. A lot of expletives, but he basically told me I was an F-up and had the opportunity to be great at something. Just let me have it for like 10, 15 minutes. I thought it was one of the most impactful phone calls that I had really in my life.

Stayed at his house once and overslept for UCLA open gym. Went down for breakfast and got another ass chewing because I wasn't being competitive enough.

The thing I remember about him is he had a tough way of showing that he loved you, but he was super, super competitive and he really, really cared about you. He showed it in a way that kind of spoke to my language.

He'll be missed and praying for the family.

Q. Obviously you guys announced that Kristaps is not able to go. Is there any indication of whether that means anything beyond today? Are you still taking that as a day-by-day approach?

JOE MAZZULLA: No, just day to day. Just the medical team and the staff just decided that it wasn't what's best for him to go tonight.

Just be a day-to-day thing to see how he is tomorrow and the next day.

Q. Obviously you have had a lot of success in the Playoffs without him. What are the challenges that are now presented without having him against this Dallas team tonight?



JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, I mean, obviously you saw in the first two games his rim protection, his ability to space the floor. But I think the thing that prepared us this year is our depth. It just looks different.

The guys ready to step in can do different things and have a positive impact, which they've done. So we just have to rely on that.

Q. How much do you feel for Kristaps with how hard he's battled to get back, then this mishap? You know he wants to go out there.

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, listen, it's tough. I've appreciated just his approach. Throughout the whole Playoffs, like I said, he's never missed any meeting, he's always been out there, done everything he can to play. Sometimes it's an unfortunate situation. It's nothing that he can do.

Definitely feel for him, but appreciate kind of where he's at. I trust that he'll do everything he can to get ready for the next game.

Q. He said to us last night if it's his call he's playing, but you can take it out of his hands. Is that how it happened? What was the process throughout the day? How was that final determination made?

JOE MAZZULLA: KP, you're not playing. He didn't look right. That was it. I wasn't involved in it. Like you said, it was out of his hands, up to the medical team. They watched him kind of go through some testing and they said it didn't feel right, so you're not playing.

Get ready for tomorrow and hopefully the next day.

Q. You seem to be very inspired by the game of soccer. I'm just curious, how did you first learn about it? Did you play the game yourself?

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, I did.

Q. What position?

JOE MAZZULLA: A little bit everywhere. When you're not that good, they just throw you around in a bunch of



different places to see where you stick.

Q. What do you love most about it?

JOE MAZZULLA: A lot of stuff. I think just the beauty of the game, the flow of the game. I think it's different. Soccer is much different than the game of basketball. A basketball star is only defined by scoring.

Soccer, you really have to pay attention to the game to recognize the impact each individual player is doing, because points are at a premium. Each guy in the right position has a direct impact on the guy in the next position.

So greatness, you have to pay attention and look for it, whereas in basketball you can look at a stat sheet and say, oh, it must've been this guy that have played really well.

So really the depths to which you have to go to understand the greatness and the complexity, the beauty and the connectivity that goes into playing the game.

Q. You mentioned testing. Can you describe what Kristaps was asked to do and how close he was?

JOE MAZZULLA: I wasn't out there. I have no idea.

Q. What other details might they have shared then?

JOE MAZZULLA: Zero.

Q. Guys like Luke and Oshae and Xavier, do you have any different conversation with them when it's definitely a no-go on KP or is it the same steady messages?

JOE MAZZULLA: It's the same steady messaging. Also you want to give them the best preparation you can as far as what the sub pattern might be and what the if/then scenarios will be. So you go over a couple of those with them, but for the most part it's the work those guys have been doing with them leading up to this point and conversations with their individual coaches, which have gone very well. I just trust the work they put in.

Q. Joe, you've done this most of the season or all season really, but past couple days you've really been louder in fighting the narratives, what the perception of what's a good performance and kind of what people perceive. Why is it so important for you to fight that as loudly as you are?

JOE MAZZULLA: I mean, I think the questions have allowed me to fight that. I don't think I've gone out of my way to do it. You guys have asked really good questions

based on that. I've been able to take the question you guys ask and give my perspective on it.

I think at the end of the day, it's about our team and it's about putting the guys in the best possible position to succeed and have an understanding that our guys are going out there and doing everything they can as a team, and why that's so important to long-term success. I think that's what we're trying to achieve as an organization.

It doesn't happen unless the players decide to do it, and they're doing it. You can't let that go unnoticed.

Q. The guys have been talking about how you have this philosophy of when you're the closest to winning, it's also when you're the closest to losing. Can you tell us where that comes from?

JOE MAZZULLA: Like if you've ever been in a fight with someone and you think you're about to beat 'em, you usually get sucker punched. The closer you are to beating them up, the closer you are to losing.

Q. They also mentioned that you've spliced some UFC on that note into film session.

JOE MAZZULLA: Closer you think you're going to submit someone, is usually when you get submitted.

Q. Yeah. Is there a particular fight you put in?

JOE MAZZULLA: There's a lot of them. Usually every single fight. I think it was (UFC) 302, guy gets hits in the nuts, complains to the ref, complains to the referee, gets distracted, he gets choked out the next round. He lost his focus.

You see (Alex) Pereira, gets hits in the nuts, looks at the referee, knocks the guy out five seconds later.

So it's the approach to what happens to you and how you handle it. But the closer you think you are to beating someone is the closer you are to getting your ass kicked.

Tonight I expect the best out of Dallas, and we got to get ready for a fight.

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