

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

Boston Celtics

Coach Joe Mazzulla

Game 3: Postgame

Boston Celtics 106, Dallas Mavericks 99

Q. You guys had a 21-point lead, what happened after that and what saved you, like what gave you the fortitude to make plays enough to hold on, obviously on the biggest stage?

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, you were going to expect a run from them because they had a 19-point quarter. And just by the type of shots they take alone, you knew they were going to make some kind of run. Some of those came at the expense of our offense. I thought we missed a couple reads that changed coverages and they changed matchups on like three or four straight possessions and we missed the read to get the right shot.

So I would say probably 60 percent of the shots that we took in that stretch we have to get better, and 40 percent I was okay with. We just missed them.

Our one-shot defense and our ability to get back to the game plan, they put a ton of pressure on your defensive game plan throughout, and you've just got to stick with the discipline of it. So we were able to do that and make plays down the stretch.

Q. You guys were able to build a 15-point lead headed into the fourth, and in that 19-point quarter you alluded to, for the Mavs, Jaylen and Jayson combined for 22. What was working for them that maybe wasn't necessarily there for them in the first half?

JOE MAZZULLA: Nothing. Our first half points per shot was 1.23. So I thought we getting really good looks. They just weren't falling. You just have to stick with it over the course of the entire game. I thought in the third quarter, we found the right spacing and frequency, and we made the right reads six times and that got us those shots and they were able to fall.

That's where the second stretch of that fourth quarter, we missed some of those reads, and they were able to come



back into the game. Those guys' ability to know that what shots they were taking, and continue to take the right ones over and over again.

Q. You went with Tillman, and he ended up plus nine overall. What did you see with him, and what made you go in that direction?

JOE MAZZULLA: He played in the Western Conference for three or four years, and so he's played against the Mavs. And so he's had that experience. Memphis has used a similar game plan, so he was used to that. I thought with that comfort level of playing against those guys for so long, he was going to be able to execute the things that we needed to execute.

And so I thought he did a great job in our switching and did a great job in our screening, getting into our spacing. And that's what we talk about with those guys, is regardless of who is in, who is out, I trust the next man up because of the work they put in and the staff that prepares them.

Q. You used to get asked if you guys took too many threes for a long time, and doesn't seem like that question gets asked too much anymore. You had double the number of threes they had for a lot of this game, and they started the come back when they actually started taking them. How has your team been able to stick with it, play through the misses, you're letting them attack your cross-matches and they are taking two? How does that math play out in the end?

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, we got asked that question a lot because it was new. Anytime you're developing a new philosophy or a new style, it just takes time for understanding and execution.

So credit to the guys where we decided how we are going to play, and we fight to do that. You know, but also just being flexible in that. So we don't want to just settle for those. I think our guys have done a good job fighting for the right shot based on what the defense was giving us. We were able to get some of those in the third quarter.

So I think it says a lot about them. The guys understand the game. They understand why we do what we do, and



they work to execute it as best as they can.

Q. What goes into weathering the storm when Kyrie and Luka come out as aggressive as they are and firing on cylinders in that first half? What resilience goes into just kind of sticking with it and staying disciplined when they are going like that?

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, I mean, it's first having awareness to how are they scoring? What are they doing? You have to ask yourself, are we executing the game plan, are we giving the shots up that we are willing to give up?

I think it was one of the quarters, we had like 26 points of shots -- of points that we can control. So you have to fight like hell to take those away. Once you take those away, then you can either execute or game plan or work to adjust.

So I thought our guys did a great job of understanding the points that we could control, and they fought to take those away throughout the rest of the game.

Q. You guys had a real big run late in the first quarter of Game 1, I think you one in the third quarter of Game 2 and two really big ones tonight. Is it just something innate about this team that they know when there's an opportunity to really hit the gas, or is it just talent, sometimes, when you have these big stretches of pulling away and making it seem so easy?

JOE MAZZULLA: I would say both teams have a lot of talent. So I think you have to have talent to get to this spot. That's a given if you want to make it this far.

But our guys have a great basketball IQ and have a great understanding of are we playing the right way, taking the right shots and giving up the right shot. They know exactly when we are not doing that.

So they have an innate ability to control the runs of the game with the philosophy that we have and execute the things. And so it's just constant building awareness, are we getting the right shots, are we giving up the right shots and are we winning the transitions. The guys do a great job of working towards understanding that.

Q. One thing you talked about a lot during the years, how it's not supposed to go a certain way, the game is not supposed to go a certain way. Occasionally a big lead goes away, but for the most part you guys figure it out in the end throughout the season. What has been the process of guys grasping that and not kind of, when they are right on the edge, not falling over it?

JOE MAZZULLA: Just what we talked about. Having an understanding of like we know teams are going to make runs; can we manage those. And we know why we make runs, and we know why other teams make a run on us.

So you just have to constantly problem solve throughout the game. You have to ask yourself why every single possession, why did that happen? Why did this happen? Was this what we talked about? Was it not? And the guys, they fight for that because of their basketball IQ.

They spend a lot of time understanding that. And that's part of the game. They got out to a big lead, and I forgot what we were down, 13? So that's just part of the game. But it's understanding why. Why are we down 13? Is it effort? Is it execution? Is it things we can control? And once we answer those questions, we can move on to the next phase of the game.

Q. Jaylen had the big third quarter when he helped you guys push the lead, and in the fourth he had the big jumper when Dallas was charging. The poise he's played with, how have you seen that grow?

JOE MAZZULLA: I mean, how can I explain Jaylen? The guy just has a growth mindset. He just wants to get better. He yearns to get better. He's not afraid to face his weaknesses on the court.

So when you have that type of mindset, you're just going to be able to take on every situation that the game brings you. He puts himself in every single situation that he sees in a game. He uses six, seven, eight coaches a day, and every situation on both ends of the floor, he puts himself in that.

And that's how you have to grow, is to become vulnerable and on the things that make you uncomfortable, and he does that.

Q. You guys have been able to put pressure on Luka at both ends and pressure out with Jaylen and Jrue all the way up the court and go at him with a bunch of different options on offense and make him work a lot. Have you noticed that working throughout the game in terms of being able to wear them down?

JOE MAZZULLA: I don't think he gets worn down. He looks pretty fresh out there. I think we could do a better job of being intentional in the offense with the spacing at times, but I don't see him getting tired at all.

Q. The intentionality on offense?

JOE MAZZULLA: We were trying to play fast, create advantages and create indecision. But we didn't create

any indecision. When you miss the first read, it's not a lack of execution from the guys. It's not a lack of like trying to execute. It's if you miss the first read and you miss the first window, it's really hard to get that window back against a team.

And so, you know, that's what we were able to do in the third quarter. We found the first read, bang, right there, and we got it like six, seven, eight times in a row. If you miss that first one, it's a nightmare to get a second and third one, and that's when you end up taking a couple shots you don't want to take.

It wasn't because they weren't trying to. We just missed it. They do a good job of changing up matchups and changing spacing and fluctuating it. So there's about eight possessions where we will definitely watch. But we have to do a better job of seeing the first read; and when we don't, we have to find the second one faster.

Q. You made the comment before the game, the closer you are to beating them up, the closer you are to losing. That's front and center now with a 3-0 series lead. What can you do to reinforce that message over the next couple days?

JOE MAZZULLA: Just stick to the things that we've been doing. I mean, have an understanding. We were down 13. I expected that. We were down one at the half, and I expected that.

You have to expect the expected. You've got to understand we are just as vulnerable if not more vulnerable than they are. And we have to play that way.

So as long as we have that mindset, and when you understand that you're vulnerable and your back's against the wall, you've got to fight. And so that's the mindset that we have to have.

Q. Derrick wasn't shooting the ball all that well for most of the game and then hits a couple really big ones in that fourth quarter. I know that's kind of what he does for you guys. Is that just his mentality? Is that your emphasis on continue to shoot the three, just lean into the math? Where does that come from?

JOE MAZZULLA: Again, it's all about taking the right shots. It's all about taking what the defense gives you. They are playing a unique defense against us because they are one of the best teams in the league at protecting the rim, and they have two great rim protectors. So if you try to become stubborn, you put yourself in a disadvantaged situation at the other end of the floor.

Our defense starts with our offense. And so if we don't take the right shot, we can't guard them. And our team has the discipline to fight for the spacing and to fight to take the right shot, whatever that shot may be.

Derrick has a green light to shoot the shots because his skill set is taking the shots that make sense. He can get into the paint and shoot the two-foot floater off there, he can shoot off the dribble threes, and he can shoot catch-and-shoot threes.

I love the fact that he continues to play. His confidence never wavers based on the shots he takes, and you can always count on him to make the big ones.

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