

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Thursday, June 13, 2024

Dallas Mavericks

Luka Doncic

Practice Day



Q. (Question from Golden State Warriors guard Brandin Podziemski.) Something that stood out to me is obviously they're making you play a lot of isolation ball, and you do a really good job of using your off arm to get by people, but I also think you're really good at creating an advantage and keeping an advantage, and you're really good at keeping guys on your hip. It makes the help defender have to pick and choose what they give up. Where did you get that from, and what's your thought process once you beat your initial defender?

LUKA DONCIC: I mean, first, I think I just look at how long the guys have been in the paint, the low man. If it's time -- if it's like two seconds, he's going to go out. I think that's the moment to attack. Then I just try to read the game.

If he comes, there's going to be a lob open to the corner. If he doesn't, I just try to take the layup.

Q. After Game 5 in the OKC series, you told me that you got back to playing for the love of the game. You remembered that. Do you sometimes feel in this series you're getting away from that when you're talking to the referees?

LUKA DONCIC: I mean, yeah. At some point, yeah. I just really want to win. Sometimes I don't show it the right way, but at the end of the day, I really want to win. I've got to do a better job showing it a different way.

Q. How can you do that Game 4 with your season on the line?

LUKA DONCIC: Go back to playing fun. We talk about how we come back from 20 points in the fourth quarter in the Finals. We were having fun. We were defending. We were running. Our pace was great. Just taking good shots.

Q. When you're in the midst of these games and you're having these conversations with officials, how

do you change your approach in terms of these conversations to ensure that not only you're staying locked in, but also continuing to help your team stay locked in, even when things aren't going necessarily your way at times during these games?

LUKA DONCIC: Just got to go away, because at the end of the day refs are going to have the last word. So just got to go away from that.

Q. How much have you studied other great players when they got to their first Finals, whether it's Michael in his first Finals or Magic or LeBron against the Spurs, and sort of what defenses tried to do to them and exploit them compared to what Boston has tried to do here?

LUKA DONCIC: I didn't really study the first Finals of some people. Obviously, they were great players. Obviously, there's the story of MJ against Detroit. That was a big thing. I think he just learned from it. It's a great experience. You've got to go through lows first to go on top. I think that's great experience.

Q. How do you guys keep any real sense of belief knowing that the odds say that this is too tough a mountain to climb out of? How do you keep believing that you can do this?

LUKA DONCIC: Just like we did before. I always talk in the regular season, there was a time we were at our very low. I think we lost five, six in a row, and from there we just went up. I think we went 17-2 to get in the Playoffs.

I know that's the regular season, but it was the kind of point we all came together, and the chemistry from there went to the top. We've just got to believe. We talk about it in the locker room. I know we can do it, and we're going to believe until the end.

Q. The Celtics are obviously going to make you work as hard as they can defensively. What's unique about the challenges they present while doing that? It's not like they're the first team to do it, but what's unique about them, and how do you think you've held up to those challenges?

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LUKA DONCIC: I mean, they have great players. Basically, all five players that are on the floor, they can really score. They can shoot.

Our strategy was just trying to make them drive more and then be on the wheel, on the rotations. I think I have to do a better job on that, just keeping in front.

Q. We've seen you elevate your game throughout this playoff run in its entirety, but in this series in particular, are there things about your game, a hole here or there that you can identify, that you feel like, hey, that's something I want to focus on in the offseason to improve myself just that much more?

LUKA DONCIC: Oh, definitely, a lot of holes, I think, still. I'm 25. I've got a lot of things to learn. This is my first NBA Finals, so I'm going to learn from it, for sure.

But we're not in the offseason yet. They've still got to win one more game. Like I said, we're going to believe until the end.

Q. Kyrie said that pressure makes diamonds. How do you turn fear and anxiety into motivation and strength to be the leader you want to be for this team?

LUKA DONCIC: Just keeping the team together. Like I said, we have great guys. We all know what we came here to do. Obviously, we're going against the best team in the NBA, but we're going to believe. It's a first for us, but we're going to believe, and that's our motivation.

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