

# NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Thursday, June 13, 2024

Dallas Mavericks

Kyrie Irving

Practice Day



**Q. You said that basketball has been a great teacher for you but life has been a better one. What have you learned in these past few years that is allowing you to have the right mindset to face difficult situations and challenges?**

KYRIE IRVING: That's a great question. Try to be simple. I think life is an incredible gift that we can't take for granted. If you've ever lost somebody close to you, that'll remind you really quick how precious life is.

I've had to deal with a ton of loss in my life, just watching people that I love kind of leave this earth, and that was difficult to deal with as a young person. And then getting older and trying to deal with the perspective of being a celebrity or famous person or professional basketball player, whatever it is, an entertainer, whatever we're called, and trying to find purpose in that and why am I here.

So just I think all in all, just learned how to not put so much pressure on myself, put things in perspective, and understand that I'm not alone. I'm still a young person in this world trying to figure it out, and I'm not supposed to have it all figured out. I think that's the beauty, too.

Just embracing the moments that I get to share with the people that care about me unconditionally, get to know some new people in this world, go from strangers to friends. I get to know my kids, most importantly, and who I want to become for them and my wife and being a husband.

Yeah, just appreciating the gifts that I've had to earn and work for and built. That's what helps me put all this in perspective, just the past few years of learning how to deal with real human emotions and not gloss over them and pretend like life is all good.

That's it. Just being real with myself. Looking in the mirror and being real. If you can be honest with yourself, then the world is your canvas.

**Q. How special is Boston's ability to guard one-on-one, not bring help and just try to stay in front of guys individually? Brown and Tatum's ability to do that. How have you and Luka dealt with some of the frustrations of trying to beat that in this series?**

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, very special to watch from afar, but also as a competitor, as a hooper, to be experiencing it at this level, it's an incredible teacher for me. I use it as a moment to learn how hard it is to win, especially against a great team that's going to guard you the way that they're guarding us.

The frustration is natural, just because you want to make every shot when you're in the Finals. You don't want to miss. You don't want to not play well. You give partial credit to them, but also there's a focus and a preparation you have to have.

Obviously, hindsight is 20/20, but looking at the first two games and how some of my shots were a little bit pressured, more than I have had in other series, and the physicality is a little bit different.

These guys on that Boston squad know my game, as well. They know it well. So they've been able to scheme for me for the past few years.

So getting over this hump is something that's been on my mind for a while, watching them, just like everyone has been watching Boston the whole entire year, be the best team in the league. We obviously knew we would have our challenges, but this is what helps us grow.

Going out there and competing with the best of the best, competing with Jrue and Jaylen and JT and seeing their ability to cover up some of their mistakes or trust each other to make the right plays on the defensive end has shown me what I have to continue to work on and also learn to how to think the game in a better way.

I'm going against the best of the best, and this is what I've always dreamt of. Whether we win or lose, it's the growth that I look at and how I can continue to be a better leader for my teammates.



**Q. When you won the championship with the Cavs, you were like the young star, and you had LeBron James who was the more experienced star. Now you're kind of in this position, Finals, that you are more experienced. How has it been for you to take Luka through it and take Luka through his first Finals? How has that exchange between you guys been?**

KYRIE IRVING: It's been great because we're learning about each other in these moments and what we're made of and what we have to do to be great at this level.

**Q. Along those lines, Luka is under the microscope now in a way that maybe he hasn't been before despite having been through so many competitions since he turned pro. You've also been under the microscope, under the hot lights. He's going through this big part of his journey. What are you able to tell him about what he's experiencing? How are you able to relate to him about that? Is he coming to you for anything about that? What's it like seeing that happen to somebody on this stage?**

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, I mean, there are a lot of first-timers on this stage. I've said it over the past week or so, just it's a new space for me, too, just being with these guys and being tested at this level, being challenged at this level.

My first Finals, although I was injured, I lost. You know, 2016, although we like to bring it up, was one of the toughest series you'll probably ever see in basketball in general.

I don't know if those records are just going to be so easy for someone just to look at and be like, yeah, we're able to do it, too. But that belief that you can win a series and win it together.

But yeah, my message to him is he's not alone in this. He's played as best as he can despite the circumstances, just injuries and stuff. He's been giving it his all. It's not all on him.

Being under the microscope in this business is a lot different for me now than probably four years ago, five years ago, because I'm able to put the big picture of life in perspective and also the game in perspective. It comes easier.

Then also I think the social media, sociopathic behavior. You know, your inner voice is not clear anymore when you're downloading other voices and other opinions. That can become hard.

Any little thing that you give your energy to can be a distraction that doesn't positively reinforce what you're trying to accomplish.

So I think we're learning that about each other right now from not only us as players but the coaching staff and everybody that's been part of this journey thus far. No one picked us to be in this position. No one anticipated us to be here.

There may be a few people in this crowd right here that had an idea, but we've pretty much broken the mold of what we're capable of doing, and I think we're trending in the right direction.

We have some positives going on. It obviously sucks horrendously that we're not at least competitive in this series right now three games in, but it's also about getting the experience and learning through these things and also learning more about yourself.

I've taken the brunt of the responsibility because these guys in this locker room, it is their first time. So being in this position, I do feel like a lot of it is on me.

A lot of my teammates would say, no, it's not just you, which I appreciate, but this is also part of my journey, and the story doesn't end here, win or loss.

I'm just appreciative that we can get another chance to extend our season tomorrow and just leave it all out there. It's all about a pride thing now, and just putting our best foot forward.

**Q. Kind of a big-picture question for you just with the year that you've had, and you seem to be so comfortable playing as well as you're playing. Do you think that you have a lot left? Do you see yourself -- you got a new contract --**

KYRIE IRVING: Where are you going with this, man?

**Q. I just want to know.**

KYRIE IRVING: Where are you going with this?

**Q. Where do you feel you are right now, and how much do you have left?**

KYRIE IRVING: Okay. Do you want to ask me that five years from now or are you asking am I retiring early --

**Q. We asked LeBron that at 32.**

KYRIE IRVING: What are you asking, how much do I have

left?

**Q. Yeah, how much longer do you feel like you're going to be playing at this level?**

KYRIE IRVING: Oh, man. Yeah. Man, I haven't even given that much thought, to be honest with you. This has been the longest season I've played in awhile. It's been six years.

So I'm looking at the big picture in a way that I probably was not ready to look at in my early 20s or late 20s.

The way technology is today, the way I take care of my body every day and the way I have the opportunity to learn more about my body as I get into my 30s, I'm appreciating.

My mind continues to get sharper. My physical tools are obviously naturally going to deteriorate, which I can appreciate, too. So adding new skill sets or adding new nuances to my game where I can be successful at this level, especially going against a more athletic league or a faster league, and you've got me over here speaking like I'm 38 already.

But at 32 right now, I just feel like the sky's the limit. I have an opportunity to be on a special team that can be one of the teams that dominates in this era. That's what I've been trying to figure out the past few years, of how to be on a great team, be in an organization where I'm trusted, and also we're able to succeed and fail together, and doing it in a way where we still have each other's backs, and no one is giving up on the dream or the goal.

Our goal is still to win a championship. That's been No. 1. For me, that's why I play basketball every year is just to be able to continue to get better but also to compete for championships.

If I'm not doing that at 33 or 34 or 35, then we probably can revisit this. But I think right now, I feel like we're trending in the right direction, and especially this organization led by Nico and J-Kidd and our new ownership group. They have a lot of trust in us, which I appreciate, which makes my decision making on what my future looks like a lot easier.

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