

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Thursday, June 13, 2024

Boston Celtics

Coach Joe Mazzulla

Practice Day



Q. (Question from Golden State Warriors guard Brandin Podziemski.) Two questions for you. One, fouling up six is something that you guys have done throughout the Playoffs, most notably against Indiana in that first game there. Where did you learn that? Who did you learn it from? What made you want to implement that? And how has your experience as a player helped you be a coach?

JOE MAZZULLA: The first one, I think our analytics department does a tremendous job. Dave Sparks and the gang is a conduit to that on the coaching staff. We have a ton of conversations about what makes sense from an analytical perspective and how do you constantly find small ways to give yourself the best chance to win, but also increase your chances of winning.

In our department, that just makes the most sense to us. Gives us the best chance to win and allows us to control the variables of the game, especially when teams don't have a timeout, which they didn't last night.

So it's a credit to them, just bringing constant trends within the game that I feel like give us an advantage and increase winning any chance you can go.

It's a little bit, one percent better, save a half a point, save a point, save .9 of a point, it makes a big difference over time.

Second one, I think just having an understanding from a player, just looking at the lens from a player's perspective. I think sometimes when you become a coach you look at it from a coach's perspective, but at the end of the day the world revolves around the guys and how they view things and the lens with which they look at things.

So you have to alter your communication. You have to alter your schedule. You have to alter things that put the players in the best possible decision to succeed. So a lot of the decisions that I make, it's like, what would I have wanted as a player. We have a ton of former players on

staff that are able to help with that, so I think that's the biggest thing.

Q. Jrue self-describes as a utility guy. Do you think that undervalues his contribution to the team, and is there any way you guys would be in this position if you guys hadn't acquired him?

JOE MAZZULLA: I would hope he does not feel undervalued by us because I think he has done a lot of tremendous things as a player and as a person.

So no, I think he's one of the ultimate values. I think to have a guy like him be able to dominate the intangibles of the game on both ends of the floor is amazing to us.

We wouldn't be in this position without any of our guys, and he's included in that.

Q. Your players have referred to you as crazy, unusual, bizarre, whatever, because of your philosophies. Do you embrace that? Do you like when your players think they don't know what to expect from you, and has that helped in fostering the relationship with guys who are just a tad bit younger than you are? Like it's not a father-son thing here like most coaches and player, it's more big brother. When they say that about you, does that make you laugh a little bit?

JOE MAZZULLA: I mean, I think the thing you just can't take for granted in the game today is a coach's greatest gift is a group of guys that want to be coached, want to be led, that also empower themselves.

So I think at the end of the day, just appreciate the fact that we have an environment where learning and coaching is important, and getting better and developing is important.

You can't be a good coach if your players don't let you -- you can't be an effective coach. Everything starts with them, their ability to buy in, their ability to execute the things.

As a staff, we're grateful. We talk about it every day. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be here. So it's on them.



Q. You know the stat that a 3-0 lead has never been successfully overcome in this league. You guys almost did it last year. In a weird way, can that help you guys focus now, knowing that it can nearly be done? Secondly, how do you block out the human condition of the next 24 hours of people thinking it's over and I'm guessing you don't want to hear any of that? How do you block that out?

JOE MAZZULLA: The first question is part of life, like any situation you're in is going to help you for the next situation. So we should be able to take everything that we learned as a team, as an organization, last year, this year, so every experience should help you prepare for that.

As far as blocking out the noise, at the end of the day we're the most vulnerable in this. So we have to remain that. We have to remain with a sense of urgency. We have to have an understanding of our environment. We have to know that we're just as vulnerable as anybody else in this situation, and how we handle that will determine our fate.

Q. You are one win away from being the youngest coach to win the NBA title since Bill Russell. In the last decade, Erik Spoelstra won the title and Ty Lue won the title and they both were young and they both have been labeled, they just win the title because they had LeBron James. Are you afraid of being -- of your work being labeled as Joe Mazzulla has the best starting five in NBA history and anyone could do the same thing in his place? Are you afraid of that?

JOE MAZZULLA: No, not at all. I think coaching is understanding that you can't win without the players. I don't care. I just want to win. I want to do it with good people, and we have an opportunity to do that. There's four rounds left in this fight, and however long it takes, whatever it takes, we'll see how it goes.

Q. You just talked about remaining vulnerable, keeping with the urgency of the moment. But does where you are in this series, does that impact how you manage Kristaps, being up 3-0, you have a cushion here? Do you have to consider where you are in the series as you figure out whether or not he can play?

JOE MAZZULLA: No. No, I think that's a rather passive way to look at things. I think at the end of the day, we have to continue to do what we do. Kristaps has gotten better from yesterday to today. He's fighting like hell to play. But it's going to be up to us to protect him and to make sure that it's in the best interest for him as a player and as a person.

Going into what's best for a player and a person has

nothing to do with where we're at from a basketball standpoint.

Q. You talked about the guys in the locker room. You've said multiple times throughout this run that this is a great group of guys. What does it mean for you to be in this moment on the precipice, knowing obviously that you have one more win but to be in this moment with this particular group of guys with a locker room and how rare is it to have a group that's like this?

JOE MAZZULLA: Yeah, I mean, saying that diminishes the other great locker rooms that you've been in. I think everybody in that locker room would say they've been a part of other good locker rooms.

I think a lot of it has to do with timing, but I think at the end of the day we're in a situation right now where everybody is on the same page, that winning is the most important thing, and that we're going to do whatever it takes for however long it takes.

We just have to remain in that mindset that it's everybody's responsibility to impact winning. As long as we stay there, we have an opportunity, we've got a chance.

So I think it's focusing on that is what you've got to be grateful for.

Q. After Game 2, I think when people saw you at the podium, they were really impressed with the way you recalled plays in the first quarter with speed and precision. I was wondering, did you always have that kind of gift? Was that just a product of watching so much film? Where did that come from?

JOE MAZZULLA: Just building retention and learning how to understand the why and building an awareness to your environment. You can't make decisions and eliminate emotion if you don't have the facts and you don't have an understanding of your environment and what's going on.

Just really trying to put yourself in a situation -- how can we get away from the emotion of your environment and how can you get to the tactical, the facts, the truth of what's going on so that you can adjust accordingly.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.