

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Sunday, June 16, 2024

Dallas Mavericks

Kyrie Irving

Practice Day



Q. We didn't see you guys on court before Game 4. We can feel there's a more tense atmosphere in the locker room before Game 4. And now during this shooting practice, you were joking around, having fun, smile. We can feel that it's lighter right now. I want to know how much lighter is the atmosphere among you guys, and how we could help during the game?

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, I don't want you to mistake us smiling and joking around with each other and being in practice, you know, for a weakness or that we are not taking this any more serious than we were in Game 4. I just think we are here in Boston and just trying to settle ourselves.

We had a meeting, just as a squad, at the hotel, where we went over film. So we were pretty locked in from there, and there was carryover into our early minutes in practice. And then when you guys come in, pretty much having fun.

It's been this way since we were kids. We want to make sure we relish in this moment, don't take it for granted and just ground ourselves here, too. I think the last two games, we were even more intense when we were here in Boston. Don't think we got as settled as we would have liked.

So we just wanted to try some things a little different, a little bit more smiling. And then 24 hours from now, getting ready for all-out battle against this great Celtics team.

Q. I wanted to ask you about your growth or evolution spiritually off the court, on the court. It seems like every interaction that you have is very, very positive. You see that just in your body language, with your teammates on the court. You see that with the chemistry, and you see that when you talk to the press. It seems like there's been a tremendous growth. Can you speak to that, and also, how have you evolved in your view since you left Boston in 2019?

KYRIE IRVING: Well, to answer your first part of your

question, I would be being dishonest if I just took the time to say thank you for putting those words together in terms of my interactions with people being majority of the time positive.

I'll be honest with you, it's not always positive all the time. I'm human. Sometimes there's some misunderstanding or miscommunications and it takes a little bit of a longer, thorough conversations just to get on the same page. I think I've just figured out in my life, a lot of people just want the time and space to be heard. They want to be listened to. And then if they respect you and you respect them, then they'll listen to you and give you the space to say how you feel as well.

I've talked about it over the past few months, just where I was in 2017 or '18, when I first got traded here to Boston. I wasn't in the place to be able to vocalize my feelings or know how to do that. I was learning how to be a man. Learning how to be a father. So part of that evolution came from that, taking the time to go inside and figure out who I wanted to become.

But also, I had to accept some of the things, some of the choices I had done in my life. When you look at yourself in the mirror, sometimes you don't like what you see, and that could lead to some depression or lead to some anxiety or lead to other mental health issues.

That's a big thing that I think our generation is spearheading, where I hope that the older generation can take a lesson out of our book, that this isn't just some spiritual '70s type of mantras we are trying to put out here. We actually believe in what we talk about in terms of meditation and having the ability to slow your life down and making sure that you keep your priorities straight.

Because the world is not going to care about how you feel mentally all the time or whether or not you are healthy when you are at home or taking care of yourself. So you have to figure out that space for yourself and figure out the village and the tribe that you want to have around you that supports those goals that you have personally.

I don't want to get too preachy, preachy. I could speak for hours. But, yeah, that's been the growth since 2017. Even

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before then. Just learning how to be a person in this world, making an impact in a positive way.

Q. You played in a place in Cleveland that had incredible pressure to win a championship because of the history and they had not won in so long. What was different when you came to Boston, because of the history of this franchise, and the almost expectation of this franchise that every year you're supposed to win a championship here, and if you don't, it's a complete failure?

KYRIE IRVING: When I look back, getting traded here, it wasn't one of my options. It wasn't like No. 1 on my list. So when the trade opportunity got approached to me, instead of going back and appreciating the Celtics' history, I just came in with an open mind and just kind of like, all right, I'm just going to go with the flow into this. But I think that was the wrong approach. Just being young.

Now being older with hindsight looking back, I definitely would have taken time to know the people in the community and talked to some of the champions that have come before me and actually extend myself to them instead of the other way around, expecting them to be there giving me advice. Because they have been through this. They have championship pedigree here. They have shown it for years. They are one of the most winningest franchises in all of sports.

So you have to show your respect here. I think that's what I struggled with initially, was figuring out how I'm going to be a great player here while winning championships and also leading a team and selflessly joining the Celtics' organization or the cult that they have here.

That's what they expect you to do as a player. They expect you to seamlessly buy into the Celtics' pride, buy into everything Celtics. And if you don't, then you'll be outed.

I'm one of the people that's on the outs (laughing). I'm perfectly fine with that, you know what I mean. I did it to myself. They don't welcome me with a warm embrace, even though I know a lot of people in the organization and I'm friends still with some of them.

But, yeah, doing it to myself. And that's what I was talking about in terms of accepting the choices. But looking back, I would have shown my respect and have more of a council around me from some of the Boston Celtics that came before me to explain what the pressure is like.

Q. What is it like for a player to come here to Boston, when look up and see the banners and everything, and

know what the franchise is about and the expectations?

KYRIE IRVING: You just expect to have a magnifying glass on you everywhere you go. I don't think Boston appreciates being kind of second class to New York in terms of the media capital of the world, but this is the media capital of the world as well. There's a lot of history here off the court.

The community has integrated into the Celtics' team. That's probably the best way I could say it. The community is what makes the Celtics great here, the Boston pandemonium. That's what makes this space so loud and so special, and they take pride in it.

If any player is coming here, getting drafted here, thinking about coming here for free agency, getting traded here, I just think do your homework and make sure you know what you're getting yourself into. That's something I could offer.

Q. What did you see out of Tim the other night and the looks that he got, and how do you guys make sure he gets those same looks tomorrow night?

KYRIE IRVING: He was just playing with a liberation within his game and came out knocking shots. That's what we need from him, is just to stay confident, stay fluid. He's been going a great job with the young guys on the bench as well, keeping them engaged.

I think that's the next part of his evolution, including all of ours, is just continue to be a better teammate, regardless if you're shooting the ball or not. I think that helps reward you when you're doing those things.

Q. You talked about you guys as a team getting settled and not having been able to necessarily do that the first couple games. Given the circumstances here, as you said, you being on the outs, how do you personally get yourself settled and get yourself to a place where you can perform at the level that they need you?

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, we just have to wait and see tomorrow, man. You know, change a few things up. Be prepared for what I'm getting myself into. My teammates, most importantly, and not making this about me or getting into the energy with anyone else other than my teammates. That's about it.

Q. I know you wanted to play well here, and maybe you indicated after the first two games, maybe not up to your standards. I wonder, what's the balance between having the responsibility to do what you need



to do, but without making it too pressure filled?

KYRIE IRVING: I mean, let's just call it what it is. When the fans are cheering, "Kyrie sucks," they feel like they have a psychological edge, and that's fair. Of course, if I'm not making shots or turning the ball over, that makes it even more of a pressing issue that they can stay on me for.

I think in order to silence even the self-doubt, let alone the crowd doubt, but the self-doubt when you make or miss shots, that's just as important as making sure I'm leading the team the right way and being human through this experience, too, and telling them how I feel.

I've had a few teammates be in this building with me for wins and losses, so I know what it feels like for both. I try to pay attention to the positive things that got us wins here earlier in my career, but also thinking about things that I can learn from in performances that I've had here where I didn't play up to par. It's just being honest about it and just breathing through the experience and having fun with it.

Q. The other day, Phil Handy was on a podcast, and he talked about coming back from a 3-1 deficit and winning those games, and your mind goes to how to win three of them. The test that you guys have before you, how do you break it down, to not look at four games, two games, three games, just look at one game at a time? How does that process work for you?

KYRIE IRVING: For me or the team?

Q. The team.

KYRIE IRVING: Man, by just thinking about the goal that we have in front of us as best we can, and try not to get tired of everyone talking about the history that has not been made.

I've said it over the past 48 hours, just putting our best foot forward and just simplifying. It's basketball. Win, lose or draw, or win or lose, that's all that can happen.

Just want to be as prepared as we can for whatever the environment is going to be like in terms of what's expected from you. But what I'm sharing with my teammates now is just enjoy the moment. We got a chance to accomplish one of our goals, which is to make it back to Boston. We have another goal in front of us, and that's to make it back to Dallas.

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