

# NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Monday, June 17, 2024

Dallas Mavericks

Kyrie Irving

Game 5: Postgame

Boston Celtics - 106, Dallas Mavericks - 88

**Q. Obviously a difficult loss tonight and that goes without saying, but I wanted to ask you about the future. You guys have built a great core, you and Luka, a lot of guys around you. How confident are you in this team's future?**

KYRIE IRVING: Very confident. I mean, that's a positive note that we can take from this series, just how far we made it and how proud I am of the guys. We answered a lot of questions this year on what we were capable of doing and now it's just about being consistent. I think probably in the last week, I said that I wanted to be remembered as one of the best teams of this era and our last few champions have been a new one each and every year.

So, I see an opportunity for us to really build our future in a positive manner where this is almost like a regular thing for us, and we're competing for championships. You know, I think from a spiritual standpoint, I think I enjoyed this journey more than any other season, just because of the redemption arc and being able to learn as much as I did about myself and my teammates and the organization and the people that I'm around. It's a lot of good people here so it makes coming to work a lot of fun.

When you have that type of environment, I think it's easy to achieve goals that are bigger than yourself because everyone's really dialed in and having a good sense of joy about them.

**Q. Over the past week, Luka has talked about failure being something to learn from, to grow from. As a 12-year veteran or a 32-year-old veteran, how do you actually take failure and take those lessons and grow from them and not just let it become a cliché that's kind of said in these situations?**

KYRIE IRVING: I mean, it starts in the summertime, it starts early in preseason when you're developing your habits. I think we went 0-4 in preseason to start, which



wasn't the best start. But we got off to a pretty decent start to the season and there was some injuries and some uncontrollable things that happened, but I think if you look at the overall big picture, Luka's right, and I've been saying it too, just failure, it can inspire you beyond measure.

We started off as a fifth seed and started on the road in every series and we were able to accomplish this and we were able to grow as teammates and a brotherhood here, a sisterhood here, where we can really take that as a positive going into the summer. So, yeah, failing at this stage definitely sucks. It's a bitter feeling because you want to keep playing and you feel like your best game is coming up next and the shots that you shoot next game are coming up, and now we got to wait two and a half months, three and a half months so the new champion gets a chance.

So, yeah, I'm grateful for the opportunity to be able to grow with these guys in this locker room. Everybody across our organization, we've been able to celebrate our wins, but also learn how to celebrate our losses too and how to grow from that. So that's the difficult part of being human. When you really love something you really want to win and it doesn't happen, how do you respond from that. So I think that's where we are now, but I think I could tell you I'm pretty confident that we'll be back in the gym pretty soon and getting ready for next year.

**Q. Before you checked out for the last time, you go, you hug a lot of your old teammates, the other guys on the Celtics. As you're walking back to the bench there, what's going through your mind and, obviously, at the end of what was a pretty emotional series for you?**

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, it was emotional anyway. I mean, every series was emotional, just because I was just uncertain on how it was going to go and how we were going to respond to a little bit of adversity. We finally ran into a team where they beat us fair and square, and we weren't able to respond to a lot of their runs and we weren't able to execute at a high level. So when I was shaking everybody's hands, that was more of a sign of respect for their journey. They have been through an incredible five-year span of going to Game 7s or losing in the Finals, so they know what this bitter feeling feels like being up

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here answer answering questions about when this next year holds and I think they used everything as motivation.

They were healthy, and they really kept their head down and weren't paying attention to any of the personal accolades or individual accolades. I think they just came together as a team and were okay with each person being great in their role and selflessly putting their best foot forward. So I think we learned more than anything from this series on what it takes to not only get back to this level, but win at this level, and the Celtics are the perfect example for us this season because of how much they have had to deal with in the past few years.

So, it's admirable, you know, and to see -- did JB win Finals MVP? Yeah, that was big-time to see that trophy in his hands. I think him and JT should have split it, but those two guys in particular have, you know, almost been like students and as well now becoming teachers in their own right. So to see them accomplish -- see them accomplish that, I'm really proud and also extremely motivated to get back to this position in the next few years with my guys and be able to win this thing.

**Q. You talked about wanting to play well against this Celtics team. You're motivated, obviously, but when it comes to how you performed, was it more of them defensively, they were pressuring you a lot, or was it -- you had a lot of shots that went in, came out, that was uncharacteristic just shots. What do you attribute it to most?**

KYRIE IRVING: I mean, basketball is a game of centimeters, man, sometimes inches, so when a ball is flying off your hands, sometimes it's going to feel good, sometimes it isn't. That's the maturity aspect. You got to move on to the next thing, and I've been talking about that. Whether I'm playing well specifically scoring-wise or I'm not, there is a team aspect here that we're becoming more gelled into or dialed into.

I can score 25 points, but if I don't, we got to be able to pick each other up, and I think that's what we're learning about each other now, where they're going to be games where the shooting is not going to go well particularly for me or someone else on the team, and that's where we have to galvanize as a group and other players make plays and opportunities created for one another. I've been at the point of attack through most of my drives going against the Celtics one-on-one or coming off screens.

So that's what the summer is for, is just continuing to work on those things that I saw this year, the physicality, being able to adjust to it and by next year be in a better position.

**Q. Two quick thoughts. One is just this is a team that's still pretty new to each other, pieces that just came in in February, a lot of youth as well. Is the next step of evolution just simply guys being together longer, getting that experience? And then second kind of separate thought, but you've been through this before, both the loss and the win at this level. Luka has not. He seemed pretty down when he was in here. Do you have a sense of what he's going through right now?**

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, what was your first question?

**Q. Just about the time together, youth and all the new guys.**

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, I would agree with that. Yeah, just time together means a lot, and failing together is not the ideal situation, but from a leadership standpoint, going through situations like that sometimes it will motivate you beyond things that you could imagine. When I was a little bit younger and I was injured in 2015 and we lost, it was a team loss. It wasn't just I was injured and we could have done this or that. So that went on my Finals record. I was 0-1. The next year we came back and won in a 3-1 comeback, and then the following year we lost against the Warriors and I haven't been back since.

So, I look at it as, you know, an opportunity for us to observe what we did well this year as a group and how me and Luka can be better as the leaders of the team, one of -- a few of the leaders on the team, and really just enjoy the ups and downs of what's coming because now we know what to expect.

So, this past year was a lot of newness. It was a lot of people being in new positions in terms of just the success. Success can be new for a lot of people too, but when you fail at the Finals, it's not something that you want to carry the disappointment forever or on to next season. We worked extremely hard to be one of the final two teams. We didn't achieve our goal, but we achieved most of our goal. So, this is just the last step that we have to get back to, and we know it's not going to be easy. We're going to be going against a lot of young teams that are emerging, but we're going to get better as well, and I think this experience will carry us forth in the following series that we play next year. God willing we make it back to the playoffs and get the chance to play our best basketball.

**Q. You were here when Jaylen started his career here, with Tatum as well. When they're going through what they're going through, playoff failures and all that, everyone is saying break them up, can they do it. Just how have you seen them grow from day one when you**

**were here all the way to who they are now, where they don't really care if one is better than the other, considering -- they just want to win.**

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, I mean, it's easy to get to that point when you have no other choice but to look at your partner or your teammates and say that we're going to do this and we're going to accomplish it, no matter what anyone says.

The hardest thing, I would say one of the most difficult things, not the hardest thing, but one of the most difficult things in this industry is, as I've been here for 12 years, is dealing with a lot of the relationship with, sort of say, social media or fans and media, and then us as players and wanting to achieve a golden legacy, so to say. Everybody looks at MJ as the prototypical guy, he was 6-0. Then you go down the list to Bill Russell and other great guys that have come through this league -- I could name a myriad of names, but for those guys in particular I think they have had the same trajectory or career path as some of the greatest to play the game, where they have lost early in their career and now they're at the top of the mountain because they earned their way there and they have been able to learn. So, again, I'm nothing short of proud of those guys, but I think this was a message to my teammates as well, that when we get this opportunity, God willing we get this opportunity again, we work hard, it's going to be more than just our talent that's going to get us over that edge. It's going to be more than just somebody scoring 30. It's going to take more than just scoring, it's going to take everything from you. That's what makes this thing beautiful too is, when you get to the top of that mountain, how do you stay motivated there. Now that they're there I think those are questions they're going to have to answer for themselves. But for us, we got to the top of the mountain and we failed, so now we have to start at the bottom, and that should be inspiring. So, grateful that I love what I do, grateful that I get to do it with people that love what they do too. So it will be a long summer, but looking forward to the start of next season now.

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