

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Monday, June 17, 2024

Boston Celtics

Al Horford

Game 5: Postgame

Boston Celtics 106, Dallas Mavericks 88

Q. Al, obviously you've played a whole lot of games and a whole lot of years to get to this moment, and you're obviously enjoying it. Just what have the emotions of the past half an hour been like as the reality sinks in?

AL HORFORD: I'm so grateful. I know I've said it before, but it's glory to the Lord for putting me in this position. It's been a lot of years.

I don't think it's sunk in yet. I'm going through the emotions right now, but I don't feel like it's over. This is an unbelievable feeling. Yeah, the confetti, everything is going on, but it just hasn't hit me yet.

Q. You alluded to it up on the podium, but you had a meeting with Wyc eight years ago, and your eyes got distracted by the ring he was wearing. How does it feel knowing you'll be getting one sized for your hand as well?

AL HORFORD: Wow. It was crazy because during free agency meetings in 2016, my agent and I, Jason Glushon, were both sitting in the meeting, and we just kept looking at this enormous ring in Wyc's hand. And after the meeting we were like, Did you notice that? That's the attention.

Man, I never forget what Danny Ainge told me in that meeting. He said, "You can win championships in many places, but there's nothing like winning in Boston. Nothing like winning as a Celtic."

And that stuck with me from that meeting. I was like, man, I'm trying to be great, and that's what I want.

The fact that it has come, it has happened, JT, JB, stepping up in a big way and leading us, it's special.

Q. How did Joe impact this group and help take you to the next level? And then what did he show you getting



through the difficulty of how last season ended and coming back probably a better coach?

AL HORFORD: Yeah, no question. You know, we all know Joe was thrown into the fire last year, and I felt like he did the best he could.

But I just think this year, everything was different when we came in for workouts before training camp. He really, I felt like, put a sprint on everything how he wanted it to be and how he wanted us to work, how he wanted us to carry ourselves and how determined he wanted us to be.

And it started from there. That energy that he had translated to the assistant coaches, to us, to the training staff, everybody, and we just kind of follow suit.

I feel like this type of team is Joe Mazzulla ball. It's defending, being gritty on offense. It's being able to -- everybody be a threat on the court at the same time.

And everything that he wanted to do, he was able to accomplish. He always knew when to push the buttons. He's hard. He can be a little whacky sometimes. But that's what we appreciate about him.

He truly cares about us, and he cares about what it means to be a Celtic.

Q. As a veteran who has been through a lot of wars over a lot of years, what's it like for you to be in this city with all of the history of this franchise and the pressure that's on guys to hang one of those banners and how you think you guys pushed through that this year?

AL HORFORD: Yeah, the first thing you have to do when you come here is you have to embrace that pressure. And I was okay with being in that position. I was okay if we were getting criticized and we weren't getting it done because I understood what it means playing here. And to your point, finally overcoming that and winning and putting ourselves with the greats, this is special.

Our group, we've had a lot of hardships the last few years. Last year, heartbreaker against Miami, Game 7. Year



before, Golden State. It's been building up.

But this team has been resilient, and we've continued to work. I'm so proud of Jaylen, and I'm so proud of Jayson. Those two guys continue to take steps forward. People all year criticizing them, all that expectation, all the pressure.

They did it. And they've done it at a young age. They led our group. I'm just very proud of those guys and to put everything aside and focus on winning.

Q. What went through your mind when Payton hit that heave at halfcourt?

AL HORFORD: Man, that was beautiful. That was beautiful. He did that, and you take a glance at the other team, and it's one of those that breaks your spirit, and then it just kind of fueled us.

But Payton, man, that just sums it up. It was ups and downs for him, not knowing what to expect, when to play, when not to play. He's the kind of guy that he is a big-time player, and it's hard because we have a lot of guys.

But man, him stepping up, cold, ready, not afraid of the moment, taking the shot; and man, as soon as he shot it, like I don't know how you guys saw it, but I was like, man, he's about to knock it down. Like this is crazy.

So, man, the fact that he knocked it down, like that was huge. That was special.

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