

# State Farm 3-Point Contest

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Los Angeles, California, USA

## Damian Lillard

Press Conference



**Q. What does it mean for you to win this, especially going through the Achilles recovery right now?**

DAMIAN LILLARD: For me, it means a lot. Just being able to get involved in some competition, feel a little bit of pressure, to do something that I haven't been able to do all year. But just as a shooter, anytime you can get in this competition and win it amongst other great shooters, I think that's one of the greatest honors you can have as a shooter in this league.

Then to get my third and kind of join a different group was special, too.

**Q. I talked with Devin before the contest. He said he figured you would do well because you've probably been shooting standstill threes working your way back. How critical was that and what was it like watching him, knowing he had a chance to win it there?**

DAMIAN LILLARD: Yeah, every day I'm up early in the morning, warming up and shooting the ball. Off the dribble, catch and shoot, every style of shot you can shoot, I'm shooting them every day, hundreds of them.

I knew that this would not be an issue for me. I can't say I knew that I would win because you just never know, but I knew I would be able to be strong out there and have a chance to.

I came in confident. I'm fresh. I don't have to go out there and play 40 minutes, 35 minutes. I think just having this year to be away, my mind and body is just fresh. So I came out there excited to do it, and that was it.

Then at the end, I saw I was kind of at his mercy. I was just like, man, he got a -- these shots can't go in. I need this one.

It fell my way, and I got this third one.

**Q. Dame, take us back to how you even decided to do this. What was the whole decision process in doing this, and how did you mentally and physically prepare**

for it?

DAMIAN LILLARD: It started off as kind of a joke. I was just like -- I was talking to (Michael) Levine about vacation and where I was going and stuff like that, and I was like, if y'all need somebody to shoot, I'm available to do it.

We laughed about it, and he was like, it's full right now, but if something opens up I'll let you know. Something opened up, and he was like, you know, were you serious about that? And I was like, you know that I'm always serious. If there's a spot, sign me up. He was like, are you serious? I was like, yeah.

Then he was like, well, what about your plans? I was like, it's just a detour. I'm going to come in there, shoot and then carry on.

It was literally that simple. I said I would do it, and the next day I was in the competition.

It didn't really take much. I think I've done it enough times. I think this was my sixth time. I think this was my sixth time doing it.

Like I said, I get up every day, and my mind is, like, engaged in being able to play the game. I knew it was an opportunity to get back on this stage. I keep saying it, but being a part of some competition. I'm going 1-on-0 with myself every single day, trying to get numbers and trying to perform better and better and be healthier and healthier.

So just to be amongst other players and put a number on the board, some time, some fans, stuff like that, I was excited for it, and that was really it.

**Q. Along those lines, what were the days like when you weren't able to go 1-on-0 and the aftermath of the surgery? How did you navigate all of that? As you sit here today, having gotten a little bit of a taste of it, what does that mean for you moving forward?**

DAMIAN LILLARD: Just when it happened, I think the best thing I did was, like, I didn't start feeling bad for myself or nothing like that. I made my mind up that it was going to



be a process and that I had to be in it mentally and physically every day and just let the time go by that way. I didn't look too far out. I asked a lot of questions to the PTs I work with, Eric, Chris, Dr. Court. Anybody, Jayson Tatum, Rudy Gay, Kevin Durant, anybody that knew anything about it, I was asking questions; what is this feeling, what's the timeline for this, what's the timeline for that. Then just doing what it took to reach those kind of benchmarks.

I just stayed strong through it. I didn't have any weak moments. Maybe some frustration, but I haven't had any weak moments in it. Before I knew it, I was getting shots up, and then it was getting shots up off the bounce and moving around.

I can't say it flew by because I remember all those days where I couldn't even walk right. But as I sit here today, I'm like, man, it's been a lot of time, and I just focused on each day. That was my approach to it.

**Q. How long did you go without shooting?**

DAMIAN LILLARD: I don't even remember. That's how long ago it seemed like because I don't remember the amount of time that went by before I started shooting.

**Q. You've mentioned a couple times now about the desire for competition and really needing that as a part of your life. Could you talk about how that motivates your rehabilitation? And also, there's been a lot of talk about All-Star Weekend and it maybe not being as competitive as people would like. What do you think about bringing that competitive nature to an event like this exhibition?**

DAMIAN LILLARD: I think this was necessary and was needed for the fans. I think about when I was a kid and I went to All-Star Weekend in 2000 when it was in Oakland, and the number one thing I was excited about was like, man, this dude is going to go against this dude in the Dunk Contest and these dudes going against each other in the 3-Point Shootout. I was once a fan like that, so I know that that's what fans want to see. They want to see the guys that they love compete.

That was a real reason for me to want to be a part of it this year. That was really it. I think it's pretty simple. All-Star Weekend is mostly for the fans.

I wanted to be out there because that's all I can do right now. So it was an easy call.

**Q. There was a time when a torn Achilles, in essence, was the end of a player's career. You mentioned Kevin**

**Durant. He's had a whole other prime past his Achilles tear. You're playing in the 3-Point Contest. There's reports of Jayson Tatum being able to participate in practices for the Celtics. What does it say about either the player dedication, modern medicine, whatever it is, that you guys are now changing the perception of what it means to go through an injury like that?**

DAMIAN LILLARD: I think it's a little bit of both. I think modern medicine is definitely part of it. It's not the injury that it used to be, and I know that from my personal experience and how I feel now.

It's definitely not what it was. I think we are continuing to learn more and more about it, how to recover from it, how to make it stronger, how to prevent it, all of those things, especially people that go through the injury.

But like you said, it's something you can come back and have another prime from, especially if you're a hard worker. I've been talking to JT, and it's all he cares about is, I've got to get healthy and I've got to be me.

I think the combination of both, it allows us to be that way. Like for me, everybody was like, oh, that's a tough injury, and what are you going to do? And in my head, I was like, I'm going to do what I always do.

Then once I started to learn and I knew it wasn't just in my mind, like a reality for me to be who I am once I'm healthy and I saw that it was physically possible, that was all I needed.

I think any of the guys that have experienced it the same as I have, I'm sure they see the same thing. It's more encouraging than discouraging.

**Q. I want to know about mindset. Like you said before, this isn't your first 3-Point competition. You're very competitive. You sat out this season. Did this feel different mentally? Did it feel like a typical 3-point competition or did it feel like a game?**

DAMIAN LILLARD: It felt like a game for me. Coming into it, I was like, I don't know if you can compete harder at a 3-Point Shootout, but I definitely cared more. I didn't come in, oh, it is what it is. I was like, no, I'm trying to win. If they gave me this opportunity, I wanted to be like -- everybody be like, oh, Dame is shooting and I go out there and get 15 in the first round and I'm done. I wasn't going out like that.

**Q. I'm sure you've gotten your share of advice or people walking up to you on the street about their Achilles injuries or advice or whatever. Do you feel**



**like you're representing the Achilles nation with this in terms of all the other players who have torn and other guys and pickup games who can do something that's never been done before?**

it's at.

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DAMIAN LILLARD: I wouldn't say I'm representing Achilles nation or nothing like that. (Laughter.)

I do think I represent strength. We are athletes, so when we go through injury, people act like it's the end of the world because people are used to us being lifted up and everything being about us. But people go through way worse. They carry on, and they continue to move forward and experience worse things than an injury.

For me, it was more about representing strength for people that don't just -- not just Achilles, but when something bad happened, I was waived, I'm hurt, I can't play, I didn't know what was going to happen, but I didn't choose to be weak about it. I picked myself up, and I just kept stepping and kept marching.

Anytime I'm in that type of situation, that's what I'm thinking is, like, how do I represent what I come from, the kind of family I come from, the kind of people I come from, the kind of city and neighborhood I come from. That's who I'm representing in this journey. It's not just about my Achilles. It's just about not being weak.

You can choose either one. You can choose to feel sorry for yourself and go out weak, or you can represent what strength really is what you could take that path to be weak.

**Q. Where are you in your recovery and your rehab? What's the next step, and how does this fuel you, moving to the finish line there?**

DAMIAN LILLARD: I think I'm at the stage where, like, it's just testing it, going through like a harsh scale of testing to where I'm not giving it any advantages. You isolate it and you put it in positions to know what's really there. When I'm jumping on both feet, I feel like it's even. But if I actually look at it, it's not like that. The right is actually significantly stronger than the left.

So it's just making sure that I'm doing honest testing and looking for results in the most critical or harsh way, so I know that it's true, and I know that I've reached the point that I need to to be out there and compete and be myself.

Being patient with it, that's really it. I think if this was five years ago, I probably would have won this competition and been like, I think I can get out there and go. But I think I'm also at an age and time of my life where I recognize those emotions are not in my best interest. That's kind of where

