

NBA All-Star Technology Summit

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THE CHAMPIONSHIP MINDSET: A CONVERSATION
WITH STEVE KERR AND BOB COSTAS

AHMAD RASHAD: All right, Wilbur. Hold on, Wilbur. Sit, sit. Sit, buddy. Come on. Okay, don't sit. Lay down, then. How about that? There you go. Good dog. Good boy.

Bob, you know my dog, Wilbur?

BOB COSTAS: Uh, yeah.

AHMAD RASHAD: All right. Let's get going on our next one-on-one conversation.

From his NBA Finals winning shot in 1997 against the Utah Jazz, to his time coaching the Golden State Warriors over many record-breaking seasons, Steve Kerr has definitely made his mark on basketball and this community.

As a matter of fact, let's give him a hand, please.

(Applause.)

And here to interview him is an icon who has also made a mark from the broadcasting chair, including all those seasons with the "NBA on NBC," a history-maker in his own right, and my main man, Bob Costas.

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: Thank you, Ahmad.

AHMAD RASHAD: I mean, we're gonna get out of your way.

BOB COSTAS: What are we doing with this guy?

AHMAD RASHAD: I'm taking him back in my dressing room. Come on, let's go.



BOB COSTAS: All right. So this is the Tech Summit, but understand that neither -- despite what you saw earlier with the five robots on the floor and Steve coaching them, neither one of us is highly technical. He's had a few technicals over the years, but neither one of us is highly technical.

So this is going to be about basketball, if that's okay. And we'll start with the more current and move to the general.

You acquired Jimmy Butler. Cost you Andrew Wiggins, who you hated to give up, but that's the way it works. And you said that Jimmy, who's had his problems in Miami, suspended multiple times, that he has an "it" factor that appeals to you beyond his ability.

STEVE KERR: Yeah, he's quite a player. And what I've learned in this business is timing is everything. And we're getting him at the right time. It's a great opportunity for him and for us, where our team is. And we're lucky to have him.

We're definitely going to miss Andrew. Played such a big role in our championship in '22, and just his presence here the last five years, what he meant in our locker room.

This is the hard part of the business, when you trade people that you love. But the business is the business, and it's about winning, and Jimmy right now gives us the best chance to win.

BOB COSTAS: Steph Curry was quoted as saying to Draymond Green, now that Jimmy's here, this is our last ride.

Fair?

STEVE KERR: Yeah. Fair for sure. And I think that's kind of what makes it a clean move. Those three guys are all on the same contract length. So we got a two-and-a-half-year window here.

I think the three of them complement each other beautifully. And that's what -- you know, when you get

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stars together, you really don't want them to be redundant. You want them to be different so that they complement one another. And that's what I'm seeing so far.

BOB COSTAS: Speaking of Draymond Green, night before last, he had a tough back-to-back. Won last night in Houston, lost a tough one on Wednesday in Dallas. And you were very upset with the official James Williams.

And one of the people -- Terry Stotts was involved, but also Draymond Green was restraining you.

STEVE KERR: Yeah.

BOB COSTAS: And when the cooler head in the room is Draymond Green, the world has turned upside down.

STEVE KERR: The irony was not lost on me, Bob.

(Laughter.)

Draymond and I are actually a lot more alike than people would actually believe. I just sort of hide my emotion a little bit better than he does normally. But we are competitive kindred spirits, and we frequently get angry at stuff.

And, yeah, I'm not proud of those moments, but sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do.

BOB COSTAS: What do you make of the Doncic-Davis deal? One of the biggest at the NBA in years.

STEVE KERR: Trades like these are very difficult to comment on as a counterpart, as a fellow competitor. We have so many relationships in the league. And so I know JJ really well. I know Jason really well, Rick Welts sitting here with the Mavs.

So when a trade like this happens, generally you refrain from commenting on the basketball part because it doesn't serve anybody well.

But I do think I speak for the whole league when I say it was shocking. It was --

BOB COSTAS: Yeah, yeah.

STEVE KERR: You just don't ever expect a guy of that caliber to be moved.

But everybody's gotta handle their business. They know their players. Everyone is trying to win, clearly.

And I would not sell Anthony Davis short. That guy is to me -- I just coached him in the Olympics. I think he's the

best defensive center in the world, and they are going to be formidable.

BOB COSTAS: Speaking of the Olympics, a great experience, I'm sure, for you, but also an indication of how the rest of the world has been catching up little by little since the first Dream Team in '92.

So both the women's team and the men's team go to the final for the gold medal against the United States, and both games are razor close.

STEVE KERR: Yeah, I remember watching you in '92 do those games, and it's like every game is a 40-point blowout.

BOB COSTAS: You were in grade school?

STEVE KERR: Well, something like that.

But it's amazing how from '92 to '24, just the level of play worldwide.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

STEVE KERR: I mean, I don't think Chuck Daly took a single time out in '92, if I'm not mistaken.

BOB COSTAS: Didn't have to.

STEVE KERR: I took a lot of them. We lost in the World Cup the previous summer to Germany in the semifinals, and then turned right around and obviously we're lucky enough to have the greatest roster assembled since the Dream Team, and still had to pull it out by the skin of our teeth.

So the rest of the world has just exploded in terms of basketball popularity, but also skill level, coaching. Really truly is a global game now.

BOB COSTAS: Remember in '92 a lot of those players on the international teams, they were just happy to be on the same floor. Like during the game, a guy would want to take a selfie with Charles Barkley or whatever.

And I think the U.S.'s first game in Barcelona was against Angola. So I throw it out to Marv Albert for, like, the setup. He's with Mike Fratello, and he goes: Bob, bookies in Luanda have taken this one off the board.

(Laughter.)

STEVE KERR: Good Marv impersonation, by the way.



Yeah, times have changed for sure. This year we had guys on the opponents' teams like talking trash to our bench, hitting a shot and then running by. And I used that as motivation after the game a little bit. It's like they're not allowed to talk trash to you guys, like this is our game.

But in some ways it's very, I think, flattering for the league and for our players to see what, as a group, American basketball over the last 30, 40 years, what it has inspired and the players and coaches who the NBA has inspired.

And it's made our league that much better. I mean, you just think about the international talent.

BOB COSTAS: You can't please everybody. Recently the Warriors play in Boston, and the fans there are upset with you because they think you didn't play Jason Tatum enough in Paris.

STEVE KERR: Yeah. I think I'm the first gold medal coach to be booed upon returning to the United States.

More than anything, it's modern media. And this is the landscape that we all have to traverse. It's not enough to win. There has to be controversy. We have to stir things up. And then we're asked to respond to it. And the reality is Jason didn't say one word to the press. He handled himself beautifully.

And so it was a story that was sort of made up from the very beginning, from our first meeting in Las Vegas. The whole point was we've got 12 Hall of Famers, and probably only nine guys are going to play every night.

And so the players all embraced it. And that was part of the strength of the team, is that they were willing to set aside all the individual stuff and commit to each other. And they did it and we won, and it was a beautiful experience. And you just try to ignore the noise.

BOB COSTAS: By overwhelming consensus, Steph Curry is the greatest shooter in the history of the game. Ray Allen, Reggie Miller, no matter who you talk to, they don't dispute that.

But by percentage, you have the highest career three-point percentage, also the highest season percentage. You had four seasons where you shot better than 50 percent from three. And in 1996 -- no one's done this except Steve Kerr -- 50 from two, 50-plus from two, 50-plus from three, and 90-plus from the line. 50, 50, 90.

Now, granted, a lot of those were off Michael Jordan double team when you were open.

STEVE KERR: All of them, Bob.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: But when you had a chance, you hit them.

STEVE KERR: When people bring that up, I sort of chuckle because I wonder the percentage Steph would shoot if he just only took the ones where nobody was nearby and didn't have to take seven dribbles into.

That's ultimately what makes him so special, the ability to shoot on and off the ball, to create and pick and roll, come across the half-court line and pull up from 35. He changed the entire landscape of the game.

But imagine what he would shoot if he just got to stand there and sit on the other side of the court and just be wide open all the time. I think he'd have a little higher percentage.

BOB COSTAS: I don't remember you shooting from the logo or shooting a step-back three.

STEVE KERR: We had a game last week in L.A. LeBron made two straight threes. And then the next play, he literally dribbled one step past half-court and shot a 42-footer that went in.

And I turned to my coaches and I said, This never happened before.

And the crowd went nuts, but it was almost just another NBA game. Damian Lillard does it. Trae Young does it. So this is what Steph has inspired. Caitlin Clark does it. Right? So he's inspired men and women.

And it's interesting when you see the young players who come into the league who shoot that shot and you kind of go: No, no, no, no, you're not supposed to. Like, some people should shoot it, some people shouldn't.

So we give Steph a lot of grief. There was a youth game going on one time at halftime. We're in our locker room. I come in. You know, some arenas, they have the middle school teams play against each other at halftime. And this kid comes past half-court and launches like a 40-footer, and it's an air ball, and all the guys are like: You ruined the game for us, Steph. You ruined the game for the young people of this country. This is your fault.

And so we give him a lot of grief sometimes for that.

BOB COSTAS: Maybe not now, but at the beginning, years ago, you're just starting out as the Warriors coach,

did you ever challenge Steph to a three-point contest in practice? Nobody's guarding you. Just free throws.

STEVE KERR: Just free throws. Yeah, yeah, the knees don't quite allow for the three-point shot. But for many years -- we haven't done it lately, but for many years after every practice, we'd have a free throw game.

And that got my juices flowing. It was fun. The game was if you make it, you get a point. If you miss it, you get minus one. If you get a swish, you get two. And we would shoot 10 free throws each.

And I hardly ever missed, and I hardly ever won because he would always swish. Like, when it came down to it, it'd be really close. He'd just swish the last one, and I wouldn't, and he'd win.

BOB COSTAS: You know, in the mind's eye, there are athletes that you think of in certain ways. So in the mind's eye, I think of you shooting threes, '97 to win the championship against Utah.

But in preparing for this, I looked up some highlight reels, and you had a left hand. Maybe they weren't expecting it, but like a little ball fake over here, switch to the left hand, go to the bucket a few times.

STEVE KERR: Thank you for pointing that out, yeah. Maybe I had a little more to my game than the three-point shot. But not that much, trust me.

No, the biggest thing in my career that helped me establish myself and ultimately have the career that I've had since, in media and in coaching, was playing for Phil Jackson and playing with Michael and Scottie with the Bulls. That changed my entire career. And a big part of it was Tex Winter and Phil Jackson and the triangle offense and the way they played, it suited me perfectly.

And it has really impacted my perspective on the game and the way I coach as well because those guys were very traditional in teaching fundamentals, but Phil was very advanced in his awareness of what brings a team together. And even the offense itself was designed to connect the group emotionally, the triangle, all five guys were constantly touching the ball.

That was in an era where most of the coaches were putting their best two players on one side of the floor and then the other guys, we used to call it the parking lot. You know, go stand in the parking lot on the weak side.

And Phil and Tex, the way they taught the game, and Phil's vision for the game was everyone touches the ball,

everyone's inspired, everyone is connected.

And the power that that brought to the group was something that I thought about a lot when I got the Warriors job and was fortunate enough to inherit this amazing team that could all pass. And it was really beautiful to watch when the game is connected like that.

BOB COSTAS: Michael Jordan has expressed his respect for you. In "The Last Dance," he talked about the skirmish you had in practice and that you stood up for yourself.

STEVE KERR: I kicked his ass, by the way.

(Laughter.)

Just that's how I remember it, anyway.

BOB COSTAS: He landed a punch, didn't he?

STEVE KERR: Yeah, those were -- could you imagine the story today if that -- actually, I can imagine it because --

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

STEVE KERR: Never mind. Let's move on. Let's move.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: You mentioned Phil Jackson. You played for Lute Olson, Hall of Fame coach at Arizona. You played for Lenny Wilkins. He's overlooked in this respect, Hall of Fame player and coach, won a championship in Seattle, coached you in Cleveland. And then of course you played for Gregg Popovich as well. So they all had to have some influence.

STEVE KERR: Enormous influence. I mean, I can't even imagine having a better apprenticeship than playing for those guys.

Also, Cotton Fitzsimmons was my coach as a rookie.

BOB COSTAS: I love him.

STEVE KERR: Phoenix. Amazing. Amazing coach.

And so to have all these influences in my life, and I take from each and every one of them. Pop has become a mentor because I played for him. And because we've been colleagues now during my 11 years coaching, I've leaned on him for a million things.

He brought me into USA Basketball as an assistant in Tokyo. Gregg Popovich, one of the finest human beings

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I've ever been around. And so I've been so blessed to be around these amazing coaches and amazing people.

BOB COSTAS: Speaking of Pop and the Spurs, early 2000s, you're coming off the bench for them. And in the Conference Finals against the Mavs, you played exactly two minutes through the first five games.

Losing big in Game 6, he calls on you, and you hit four for four on three-pointers, big comeback, win the series.

STEVE KERR: That was a fun night. That was an amazing night. Yes. One of the highlights of my life, honestly, because I was 37 and probably, you know, three years past when I should have retired, but hanging on.

And to have a moment like that, when you kind of feel like your best days are done, it's pretty special. And that was an amazing team to be a part of. And, you know, again, you mentioned the players or the coaches that I played for, the teammates that I had, Michael and Scottie, Tim Duncan, David Robinson, just amazing people, amazing, you know, connectors.

The way the locker rooms felt in Chicago and in San Antonio, what an experience. And now to have the same thing in Golden State with the players that I'm able to coach, it's -- I'm very blessed.

BOB COSTAS: I remember watching that game. It was the first year after the "NBA on NBC." So I'm watching on television from a distance, and you hit the four shots, and your teammates are, you know, throwing their arms around you during a timeout. And you're smiling like a kid in a junior high game.

And now fast-forward to the 2019 Finals and Game 6 against the Raptors. The game is close at the end, and there's some sort of out-of-bounds play where you had a chance right at the end, the last few seconds, some sort of out-of-bounds play that fizzles.

And you're standing there at mid-court, and you have kind of this rueful smile on your face. So that leads to this question: What accounts for your perspective on the game, which I think is different than some others?

STEVE KERR: My parents, number one, just the perspective that, you know, they taught my siblings and me, you know, growing up to have a healthy sense of respect for how lucky we are to live the lives that we do.

And then I think Phil and Pop, it was a huge part of their coaching styles and philosophies to -- you know, Phil had a Zen saying that he would use frequently, something along

the lines of, you know, you treat every day like the fate of the world depends on your efforts with full awareness that nobody actually cares about this basketball game other than this little world, you know.

And Pop was the same way. You know, Pop would inject these worldly views into our daily schedule. Like, you know, we'd have these shooting games, you know, on shoot-around days. It's like, you know, most coaches, like, all right, blue down there, white down there. You know, Pop would say: All right, everybody who voted Republican, down there; everyone who voted Democrat, down there. You know?

BOB COSTAS: And this is the NBA. How can you get even sides?

STEVE KERR: Well, it was like nine on three, you know. But David Robinson was, at the time, quite conservative. And so he went down there, and then I think a couple of guys felt a little sorry for him, so they went down.

At the time it was -- that was a source of humor and joy. We didn't live in the same divisive times and -- you know.

But my point is Pop would inject this worldly perspective into our daily rituals that I learned from and never forgot.

And so we try to offer our players a similar perspective, how lucky we are to do what we do. And what you learn in sports is we all get punched in the stomach. We all do at some point. Just like everybody in life, right? It's just nobody can win every time.

So my rueful smile at the end of that series that you mentioned, you know, Klay Thompson has an ACL in that series, Kevin Durant tears his Achilles. And these guys are still out there fighting and fighting. It was so inspiring.

And I was smiling at Steph like, Are you kidding me? What an effort. You know, what -- just what a -- I had chills just -- even though we lost, it was just amazing to watch the team continue to fight through all that.

BOB COSTAS: The Bulls team you were on in '96, completing their -- or actually beginning their second three-peat in '96, goes 72 and 10. In '16, you go 73 and nine.

STEVE KERR: Right.

BOB COSTAS: Which team was better?

STEVE KERR: Oh, don't do that, Bob, please.

BOB COSTAS: I had to do it. You can handle it any way you want.

STEVE KERR: Fair enough, fair enough.

Such a different game, the three-point-line difference. I think the '96 Bulls broke a lot of barriers in terms of playing five guys who were all versatile.

And, you know, Kukoc -- when we would put Kukoc, Rodman, Jordan, Pippen, and Ron Harper on the floor, it was stunning to watch. It was, you know, five guys who could guard pretty much every position and switch everything, and they could all handle the ball.

To me, the '96 Bulls were a precursor to the 2016 Warriors. The way each team played was similar. The versatility, the play-making from all those different spots. The difference was the three-point line just became such a dramatic weapon in '16, and that didn't exist in -- and I know I didn't answer that question.

BOB COSTAS: That's all right. That '16 team is in the middle of a five-year run. You go to the Finals every time. Probably the best of those teams is the 2016 team.

STEVE KERR: Yeah.

BOB COSTAS: And you're up three games to one, and LeBron and the Cavs come back. In fact, you played them four times in succession in the Finals and beat them three out of the four.

Do you look at that as if this was the masterpiece, and right at the end someone painted a mustache on the Mona Lisa? I think of like Belichick's Patriots, right? They're 18-0. Shula's Dolphins would have no argument if they had beaten the Giants to go 19-0 because they dominated their opposition to a greater extent, and it's 19, not 17-0, and it slips away right at the end.

STEVE KERR: Yeah, yeah. Remember Mercury Morris for the Dolphins?

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

STEVE KERR: Every time an NFL team would lose to not go undefeated, he would get it. I was picturing my Bulls teammates after we lost, like, toasting each other. Like, yes, they're not -- I mean, we were so good that year and the players fought so hard to achieve that record.

They all wanted it. I was very cautious about overdoing it and chasing it too much and wearing the guys out. And they were way too competitive for that. And so to win 73,

it'll never happen again. I'm very confident, like DiMaggio's hit streak, it'll never be broken. To not finish it was the proverbial gut punch that I mentioned earlier. But it's sports. It's just --

BOB COSTAS: A measure of the character. You come back in '17 and '18, almost as good with the overall record, rampaged through the playoffs, won the championship both times.

STEVE KERR: Yeah. Well, we decided we're going to really respond in a powerful fashion by signing Kevin Durant.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: Don't piss us off, or watch what we'll do.

STEVE KERR: Yeah. We got this. We know exactly what we're going to do.

So, yeah, talk about a stroke of fortune to be able to sign Kevin in the aftermath of that was -- that's when we became the villains. We were -- my first couple of years, we were the darlings. Everybody loved watching us play, Steph Curry. And then all of a sudden we were the villains, and we took on a different realm.

BOB COSTAS: The other night, just this past week, the Sixers and the Bucs combined for 100, exactly 100, three-point tries in a single game. Have we become two three-point happy? You, master of the three-pointer?

STEVE KERR: Probably, probably. I mean, I don't love that many threes. But the analytics and the film and the skill have all helped us reach this point. And if you don't embrace the three, you're going to have a really hard time winning.

And so I think we're third or fourth in the league in three-point attempts, 40-plus.

BOB COSTAS: But you got Steph Curry.

STEVE KERR: We have Steph Curry.

But my first few years, we just -- a novel concept, we only had our best three-point shooters shoot a bunch of threes. That seemed to make a lot of sense. Steph would take 10, Klay would take 10, and you'd sprinkle in a couple others.

I don't think we were actually at the top of the league in three-point attempts. But what's happened over the last probably five, six years is people have realized, young players have realized there's great value in learning how to



shoot a three.

Coaches have realized the value of if you can put five guys on the floor who can shoot threes, like Boston did last year with Porzingis and Horford, it's impossible to guard. So this is just the evolution of the game. And I don't see it turning back.

I also don't think it's a huge problem. There's been that topic brought up. I would argue to anybody who's complaining about the game, I would argue, if you go back and watch the '80s, not every game is Magic-Bird. No, everyone's dumping the ball inside, throwing it into the big guy, and it wasn't that exciting.

BOB COSTAS: And post Jordan Bulls and post the run of Shaq and Kobe together, there were a lot of ugly games. There were Final games like 78 to 75 that were hard to watch.

STEVE KERR: That's right. And so I think the league has always done a really good job of taking the pulse of what's happening with the game itself, adjusting the rules, adapting, and then helping to create a better product.

And what I'm seeing right now, the skill level is just so off the charts. If I could pick out one thing that I could improve for young players growing up, it's passing.

And I think the advantage that the European players have over the American players is they play multiple sports. And I think that's a huge advantage.

Steph Curry, multiple-sport guy. Steve Nash, multiple-sport guy.

You can see it. Steve Nash, when I was in Phoenix as GM, and I'm watching him dribble behind the basket, and nobody did that, right? He'd drive baseline, and then he would keep his dribble alive and go underneath. And it dawned on me: That's hockey. He's playing hockey.

BOB COSTAS: He's Gretzky behind the net.

STEVE KERR: He's Gretzky behind the net. And that came from his hockey background.

And Ginóbili, Kukoc, soccer players, you know. You see the passing, the anticipation of the cut. And that's something I think we can learn from, in our country and player development at the younger grassroots level, especially, how do you teach players to pass and to see the field or see the court?

And I think it's easier for players when they play multiple

sports to kind of see all this stuff. But we don't do that in our country now. We specialize in one sport, and we stay with that. And I think it hurts our development.

BOB COSTAS: They have us on a tight schedule. They're telling me we've got to wrap it up here. Folks, Steve Kerr.

(Applause.)

STEVE KERR: Thank you.

BOB COSTAS: And, as I did so many times over the years on the "NBA on NBC," let's go to Ahmad.

AHMAD RASHAD: Thank you, Bob. Thank you. Boy, that brings back memories, doesn't it? And Steve was on the court at that time too.

All right. Anyway, we're going to take a break, then we'll circle back for our last session. So hurry back.

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