

Emirates NBA Cup

Friday, December 13, 2024

Milwaukee Bucks

Doc Rivers

Semifinal Practice Day



Q. Doc, how does it feel to be here? What do you think of the tournament?

DOC RIVERS: I like the tournament. I think it's a really, like a litmus test for the team. I look at last year, and I thought Indiana, do they make the Eastern Finals if they don't have this tournament? It gives you a free practice run in playoff situations. It's not the exact same.

For us we got off to a rocky start, and now we're here. So I think this tournament can do a lot of different things for a lot of different teams. So I like it.

Q. What do you say to the people who might note that the bigger named teams in the league are not here?

DOC RIVERS: That's not our problem. Everyone had the chance to get here, and you can't tell me everyone wasn't trying to get here. The teams who are here earned it, and they should be here.

Q. You mentioned Indiana, and then if you look at this year's tournament, on the left side we have the top two teams in the West. You and the Hawks got off to bad starts, and you're now red hot. Do you think the ability to get this far in the tournament does foreshadow what's to come in the spring?

DOC RIVERS: I mean, I don't know. I'm smart, but I don't know the future. I'm hoping. I guess it says something. It doesn't say nothing. That's what I would say to all that.

But how many games in the year? I've learned from being in this job for a long time, you don't overreact to a fast start, you don't overreact to a bad start. Everyone else does, but the teams who are in it shouldn't. Coaches certainly don't.

Then the key is being ready at the end of the year. That's the key. But this does help everybody who's in it.

Q. Where have you seen the maturation in Trae's game? He's this fascinating guy, obviously, puts up great numbers, and he's got supporters because of it, and he's got detractors because he does play with a

certain swagger, which is great. Where do you see his game going?

DOC RIVERS: The swagger, I don't think anyone cared about. At least from a coach's perspective, if you don't have some kind of confidence or swag, you can't be a good player. You definitely can't be a great player.

I just think his ability to keep everyone involved. He's always done it. He finally broke Doc Rivers' assist record. It only lasted 39 years. So when he came up to me and bragged about it, I said it took you long enough.

What he's doing a better job of is on both ends of the floor. Defensively he's figured out a way of keeping himself out of actions. I know that sounds easy. That's hard to do, and he's brilliant at it, he really is.

Watching the tape, we were trying to put him in actions, and somehow he kept getting out of the actions by switching and communicating. To me, what he's done is he must be really studying the game on both ends of the floor, and you can see that in his play.

And he's earned the trust of his players. This team likes playing with him, that's obvious. I couldn't say that in the past, but now they love playing with him.

Q. This is personal for tomorrow now that he broke your record?

DOC RIVERS: It was personal last year when I was trying to get the Hawks to trade him so I can keep the record. Now it's no longer personal (laughter).

Q. Giannis just turned 30. I'm wondering, how do you think 30 in 2024 relates to 30 maybe when you hit that number? And what do you make of Giannis, where he's at in his career, what we can look forward to?

DOC RIVERS: I don't know if the prime years is changed honestly because I think -- prime is basketball IQ and physicality having a collision at the same time. That's what prime means, for the most part. So I don't know if prime comes earlier than it did 20 years ago, 30 years ago. Maybe it does because guys come into the league earlier,

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so maybe that is true. I don't know that.

Physically he's in a great place. I think IQ mentally he's probably in the best place of his career. I think it says that by his numbers, by his passing, by his ability to read defenses.

Even in the short time I've been here, it's light years seeing how well he handles different situations defensively when teams are trying to do different things to him, and his numbers say that.

Q. Do you see him as a guy that goes 10 more years?

DOC RIVERS: Ten years? I don't know. That's all like luck too and health and will, if you want to do it.

Guys are in way better condition. We have 1,000 physical therapists on every team now. You think about it, we had Joe O'Toole. He was our trainer, our PT, our equipment manager, our travel secretary. That's who we had for my whole eight years. No one worked on your body. Now all these guys are in so much better shape. They have so much more information about their bodies. They have so many avenues to go work on their bodies.

But I still think it comes down to the will, do you still want to play.

Q. To follow up on Giannis, do you think he has the drive to win this, having come so closely last year, and then also maybe complete the championship MVP and this as well?

DOC RIVERS: I think Giannis just has the drive. I think Giannis wants to win in everything he does. That helps your team. Checkers, it doesn't matter, he just wants to win. He's deadly serious about his profession. He's been a joy to coach in that way.

If it's something about basketball and something about anything we want to change or anything, he is on board. From a coaching standpoint, nothing easier than that.

Q. I'm kind of curious, obviously you guys have the superstars. You guys are a national team --

DOC RIVERS: We're the old team.

Q. You guys have the old team. What does playing on a stage like this, how is it different? What does it do for your team as far as this?

DOC RIVERS: That's a great question. I don't know the answer. Some of our guys have been on big stages. We

have five guys that have been to The Finals and won it. Some have never been on a big stage.

Every year your team's on a different journey. I just think mixing those two groups together and seeing how we react is a good thing. It's a great teacher. I'll learn something through this. I just don't know what it is.

Every team will get something out of this that will help them moving forward.

Q. Steve's question triggered this question in my head as well. Giannis just turned 30, LeBron is 2 1/2 weeks from turning 40, and he's only averaging 23, 8 and 9 this year. We've seen it for 22 years, but can you make any sense of 40 years old, averaging 23 a night?

DOC RIVERS: No, what LeBron is doing is maybe -- who knows because of health again, it could happen again. I just don't see it.

Like I always tell Giannis when we started watching film together, I tell him all the time, like with Giannis, you're 1 of 1. There's nobody like Giannis. We've never seen anybody like Giannis, and we've never seen anybody like LeBron.

LeBron is deadly serious about taking care of his body. Most people wouldn't do what LeBron does off the floor, and that's why they don't last. LeBron has decided to do it all, and that's why he lasts. But it's amazing to watch.

Q. Just not being around you guys much this year, with the expectation you have and the roster you have, I'm wondering what the impact of the start that the Cavs and the Celtics had on you and sort of where you think you are now compared to them?

DOC RIVERS: Zero, honestly. We loved it, started out 20-0 like everybody else, but I don't think the title is going to be given this week. I'm positive of that.

Honestly, we just worry about us. We let everybody else worry about all the other stuff. We got off to a tough start, played poorly, couldn't make shots, couldn't defend. Rough schedule, injuries. We had a lot of stuff. So will every team at some point go through all that.

That's why, again, I said earlier, you don't overreact to a great start, you don't overreact to a bad start. If you believe in your team, if you think your team has a chance to be a really good team by the end of it, you just try to build through the year.

When it's time, the first thing you pray health. Then the

second part is you want them to be playing on all cylinders, working together, understanding how this team needs to win, and that's a journey, and we're on that journey now.

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