

Emirates NBA Cup

Friday, December 13, 2024

Milwaukee Bucks

Giannis Antetokounmpo

Semifinal Practice Day



Q. Giannis, sometimes it seems like there's a gap in playing defensive rebounds between the team and the other team. Do you think there's room to play better at guarding the defensive rebounds so you guys can be better moving forward?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: For sure. Especially with a team like Atlanta. I think last game they had like 22 offensive rebounds. Against us, they had like 14 or 16.

Yeah, we've definitely got to do a better job boxing out and getting more rebounds and starting that offense.

Q. The way you guys started the season, did the struggle -- was it tough and put some urgency, like you really wanted Khris to get back, knowing he was doing everything and he was going to come back at the right time. Did it make you impatient for him to come back, or did knowing he was going to come back take some of the sting out of what you were going through?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: No, like no matter what happens on the court, no matter our record, I don't think you can pressure your teammates to come back and he's not 100 percent ready. You want him to be fully healthy so when he stays on the floor, he's comfortable, he's able to help the team, and he's not out there being unsure about his health and his rhythm.

So I don't think at any point in my mind I was thinking about Khris coming back. The number one thing, I've been with Khris for 12 years now, I always want him to be out there when he's fully healthy. I think it goes both ways. He wants me to be out there also when I'm healthy, not when I'm overcompensating.

But at the end of the day, I feel like in the beginning of the season, when we were 2-8, it's a feeling you don't like, like nobody likes losing. Everybody plays to win, I believe.

I think we definitely had as a team a little bit more urgency, we had to fix some things. We had to play more team basketball. We had to compete at a higher level. We had to play, we had to create better circumstances for our

teammates for them to be great.

Because Damian and me, we're going to figure things out on the court, but we have TP, GT, Brook, Bobby, AJ, Andre Jackson, all the guys that come from the bench or next to us, we have to be better to make it easier for them and set the table for them. I think me and Damian came together and realized that's very important. From the time we did that, we've been 9-2. The last 11 games, we've been playing great basketball.

Now it's definitely a plus having Khris back because, man, he takes us to the next level with his IQ, decision-making, shot ability, defense. So it's great to have him back, and it's even better to have him back now that he's 100 percent healthy. We don't have to kind of worry about something, knock on wood, happening to him.

Q. I know we missed it by a few days, but happy belated birthday.

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: Thank you.

Q. LeBron is a couple weeks from 40. You just turned 30 obviously. Have you thought at all about what it would be like to continue to play on your level until you're 40, what it would take to stay elite for as long as a guy like LeBron has?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: I've thought about it. What he's done is incredible, never been done, especially at the level he's playing.

For me I always look at the other players that kind of set the blueprint for us, and this is something that's never been done before. Now moving forward, it's something that I always think. I'm like I definitely want to play late into my career, like 37, 38, 39, as much as my body can allow me to play.

But I have to do a good job of taking care of my body, which I think I believe I do, but he kind of set the path for us, set the blueprint for us. We've just got to follow. Whoever wants to follow has the blueprint. So I want to follow that.



Now, not everybody's the same. You've got to not only involve -- not only do you have to take care of your body. You've got to involve your game too, kind of change your game. There's so many things that plays a big role for you to be able to play until 40.

But it's something that, definitely, if I can do it, I'll do it. If I can play until I'm 45, I'll definitely play until 45. If not, it is what it is.

Q. You mentioned blueprint, LeBron and Lakers won the first one last year, and you mentioned after Orlando --

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: Coach Ham too.

Q. Taurean Prince as well.

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: Taurean Prince, Coach Ham.

Q. Like you can hold up a trophy and win a championship with this. What did maybe LeBron and other players wanting to do this last year -- not that you didn't want -- there's an importance there. I felt like he put an importance on this and winning this. Is there something to that now two years in of this is important, this is an important championship for an organization to win, for a player's legacy to say NBA Cup champion, to hold that trophy, to have that on the resume, so to speak?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: For me, every game is important. Every game, I play to win. I only know one way to play, I always try to play hard.

I think it was important for all the teams that were here last year. We wanted to win the Cup, but unfortunately, we didn't. I think we had a good chance to make it to the finals, but down the stretch, I remember the last two minutes we turned the ball over, they make a couple of shots and we weren't able to win that game.

Hopefully this year we can kind of erase that bad taste we have in our mouth from last year, but I think there's importance for all the teams this year. Every Cup game that we've played this year, we've been extremely locked in, we play to win. That's why we're here.

Now, that doesn't mean we're going to necessarily be the championship team, but I hope we play good basketball tomorrow and the few days after that and we're able to lift that cup.

Q. Why do you think your team was able to make it

here after starting 2-8? How were you guys able to stay together? And for you as a leader, how did you use your voice to help guide guys out of this?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: I wasn't. I wasn't thinking about In-Season Tournament games, to be honest with you. It was a game. The only thing that changed for me was the basketball court, actually like the court, the color of the court.

So at the end of the day, we were playing very, very bad basketball at the beginning of the year, and we just needed to win games. Like our goal is to make it to the playoffs, make a deep run, and hopefully we can put ourselves in position to win a championship.

By playing the right way, by playing team basketball, by going out there and competing, sometimes you put yourself in the position to be here, and that's what I think we did. I don't think anybody was, okay, this is the In-Season Tournament on Thursday, we got to play 150 percent then so make it to Vegas. I don't think that was our mindset. We were just trying to turn the season around for us. We were bad.

Now we've been competing, we've been playing better, guys are together, and we've had a great stretch. We've just got to keep it going. It doesn't matter if we're playing in Vegas or playing in Milwaukee or playing in the NBA Finals. We've just got to keep focusing ourselves and playing good basketball and try to win games, as many games as we can.

Q. Obviously last year you guys played and came here and I think had a game basically 24 hours after you got here pretty early on Thursday. Obviously the schedule got moved around, a little more time in between games. I'm just curious in general do you like the way this is set up now compared to last year? In general, is there anything else you'd like to see changed about this tournament or this format?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: No, so far I've been having fun. As you said, last year we didn't have a lot of time to rest. I think we played the Knicks in Milwaukee, then we flew in after the game and got to Vegas at 4:00 a.m. The next day we had practice at noon, so we weren't able to rest. Then the next day we played the game at 12:30, which was kind of hard. And the team that we faced, they were here the day before, so they had a little bit more time to get accustomed to Vegas, to everything, to the environment.

But I don't think there's anything to change. I kind of enjoy my room. My room is nice. The arena here is nice. You

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

guys make it feel real. I overheard a couple players while we were walking in, and they said, oh, wow, this is real. That's how I felt last year.

So it's a good environment. I love it. I love playing against the best players, tough games, good environment. Like so far I've been having fun. So I don't think there's anything to change.

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