

Emirates NBA Cup

Saturday, December 14, 2024

Milwaukee Bucks

Damian Lillard

Semifinal Postgame



Milwaukee Bucks - 110, Atlanta Hawks - 102

Q. I want to ask you about that first quarter. You were 0-5 in that quarter, but then it transitioned to you playing the game the right way. I know you spoke about that a lot at Formula Zero camp. You get the action from AJ, you fill in, you get a catch-and-shoot, then you do a get action with Giannis, then you get a double stagger; all of them were off of catch-and-shoots. Talk about playing the right way and not needing to take a million dribbles to get your shot going and then getting into your back work after that?

DAMIAN LILLARD: Yeah, I think you just got to play the game the right way. Especially when you're on a good team. I'm on the floor with a lot of good players, a lot of shooting. You go out there with a guy like Giannis who is going to draw lot of attention when he's getting downhill. So there's really no reason for me to force the action.

There's nothing wrong with getting off of the ball and spacing because of that; that's been a huge part of our success is allowing the ball to move, and it ends up where it's supposed to when everybody's doing right thing.

That's all I did. A lot of catch-and-shoot opportunities came because of our spacing and the guys that I'm on the floor with. It's just up to me to take those shots, be ready to take 'em and make 'em. I started off missing 'em, but I got a lot of clean looks, and I know from experience, when you get a lot of clean looks, the ball might not go in sometimes, but it creates a good rhythm. Like I felt good about the shots that I was getting. The ball felt good coming out when I was shooting it.

We were winning the game, so I just continued to stay aggressive, take the shots that was there, and just do the right thing and then eventually it came back around, so that was it, just trusting the game and doing the right thing.

Q. This whole thing is still two years old. Do you feel you and your team -- you guys have been here last year. Was there an easiness to preparation? Did it

feel like practicing?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I wouldn't say an easiness, but I think we probably looked a little sharper this time around. Last time we were ready, but this time we came into it remembering our last experience. We came correct. We knew it wasn't going to be easy playing against a good team, but we prepared, and it just felt familiar. Didn't feel like a random, new thing.

I would say it just felt familiar coming back the second time.

Q. There was a ton of guys diving on the floor, all that good stuff, but what did Giannis and Brook combining on that block do for you guys down the stretch?

DAMIAN LILLARD: It's a big play. I think any time you get into a back-and-forth game, where it's a one-possession game and you're playing against a team, and they lead the league in lobs, they've got shooters all over the floor, they score points when you play at a high pace. So once you get down the stretch that last two, three, four minutes, the game comes down to who's going to execute offensively, and who's going to come up with timely stops.

Sometimes a good offensive team, they're going to make great plays. That was about to be a great play by them that we defended just fine. Fortunately, we've got two seven-footers in the paint that didn't give up on the play, and we were able to come up with a big stop.

Q. How are you going to prepare for the Championship? Are you going to watch tonight's game live?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I mean, I play the game, and then I watch the game. I'm somebody, I go home and I try to watch every game if I can. The game of basketball, any time I get an opportunity to watch a game, I'm watching it, whether it's on my phone, iPad, TV, whatever. I'm definitely going to watch the game, and I'm going to watch it with the idea that we're going to be playing one of these teams in a couple days and just seeing what's working for them, what they do.

Meanwhile, I've seen them play a bunch of times, both

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teams. I'm going to watch them both closely knowing we're going to see them in a few days, and obviously we'll do our team prep where we watch film and have practice and break down the things we want to do, once we find out who we're playing, and that's really it.

Q. Early on in seemed like every time the Hawks were speeding things up, you guys sped up your offense, but later on in the game, especially in the fourth quarter when they were turning the ball over, you guys kind of slowed things down and you went back to that two-man game with Giannis. How would you describe the evolution of that two-man game over the course of the season?

DAMIAN LILLARD: Yeah, I think early in the game, obviously I talk about the pace that they played. They're one of the fastest teams in the league coming down the floor. A lot of times teams that play at that pace offensively, they struggle to get back when the ball is going the other way. I think that's kind of why we were pushing it the other way, because it's hard to get back when you play at that pace.

Then as the game went on, it becomes a game where execution matters. You don't want to be pushing through possessions. You want to have good quality possessions. You want to make them have to defend and you want to position guys where you want them to where it's in your favor. That's what we did. We went to that two-man game, me and Giannis, on the clear side, so we had space and there was no extra defender there. We had room in the paint, so they would pre-rotate to Giannis, that high-low was working, and we were able to execute that a few times down the stretch where we started up and nobody was getting it. Nobody ran backside is getting to get that pass over Brook, so us slowing down and just executing to where me and Giannis are the first two guys to make a play, the first two options to make a play, and if not, we were positioned on the weak side to be able to take advantage of it how we wanted to is just how it worked out.

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