

Emirates NBA Cup

Monday, December 16, 2024

Milwaukee Bucks

Giannis Antetokounmpo

Championship Practice Day



Q. Congrats on making the Championship Game. You could possibly follow LeBron in adding to your resume as the Cup MVP. Is that something you follow, the accolades you're building up to this stage of your career?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: No, no. I haven't really -- I don't really think about that. I go out there, I try to compete. Play at a high level and try to improve as much as I can.

I think when you approach the game that way, things like being in the Finals of the NBA Cup, winning the Championship, things like that just fall in place. I think any player that approaches the game, approach any big game thinking any -- oh, all season, I want to win the MVP, I want to do that, I want to do this, and that is main goal, it won't happen. It won't happen. You know, because you approach the game the wrong way, and you're thinking about yourself.

Yeah, I wanted always to be one of the best players to ever play, like every kid that plays basketball. When you're in your backyard and you're dribbling the ball or in your neighborhood playing in your basketball court there, you're thinking about being one of the best and making that shot and making a cross-over to a jumpshot and dunking on somebody. You always think about that.

But it takes so much more. You know you've got to sacrifice so many things. You've got to be consistent. You have to have a fearless mentality about yourself. You've got to have confidence.

So it takes a lot more for you to get to that point. Even when I got to the league, obviously I saw a lot of players, I think my first interaction being around the All-Star Game and being around all these NBA greats, Carmelo was there, Steph, Klay, Cousins, LeBron, Jimmy, like all these players, you see the way they carry themselves.

You're like, okay, you've got to like -- you've got to give more. You've got to give more to the game and that's what I always try to do. I try to give everything I have for the

game, and if that sometimes leads to success and individual accolades, that's good. And if not, it is what it is.

Q. At the start of the year you were about 25th in defense through five games and now you are I think 11, 12, right around the Top-10. What do you think has changed defensively that you have been able to put it together in this way?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: I think we are competing. I think we are competing more. You know, I feel like everybody understands in order for us to be in a game or to win a game, we've got to compete more. Early this season, I felt like we had this mindset, just because we have great talent within the team, that things don't just happen. Like guys just going to dribble the ball up and give us the ball; I'm going to go the other way and try to score. And that's not what happened in the first 10 games.

We were 2-8, and I think we came together, watched a lot of film. Had a lot of conversations, and we said, we've got to compete with every game we play. Win or lose we've got to compete. It's got to be a close game. We've played a lot of close games this year, and it's going to be the little things that we have to do that's going to like change the game. And I think at times, we've done those little things, and other times we haven't.

But we have a lot of work to do. We're not at our best yet. Got to keep on improving. It's good that we've played well the last couple of games but we have a lot of work to keep on doing.

Q. The game has changed a lot over the last 10 years, especially when it comes to three-point shot, seeing teams like Boston over 50 per game and a bunch of teams in the 40s. Do you think the game itself, the quality of play, is getting better or worse during your time in the NBA?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: I don't know. I don't know. Because like I'm not the one shooting the threes, you know.

So I don't know, obviously I think the game is evolving. If it's evolving and it's becoming better, I have no idea. I've

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got to think about that question.

But yeah, when I came to the league in 2013, teams weren't shooting this many threes, and I know it wasn't that long ago, but I remember like you had players like Al Jefferson, like we had a great player on our team, Greg Monroe, we had to put the ball in the post and then play off the post. Guys were moving, screening, cutting. You were playing deeper into the 24-shot clock.

Now it's different. It's totally different, and I don't know if that -- I don't know if that necessarily helps my game. But at the end of the day, the game is evolving. It looks good. We have more eyeballs watching basketball right now.

So I don't know. I don't know. I can answer that question maybe when I see you again.

Q. After the game Saturday night, Doc came in and said that some of the rookies, some of the younger guys on the team who don't make big salaries were very, very happy to have the chance to play for \$500,000 tomorrow night. What does the money really mean to guys, even guys at super-max level like you and guys making minimum and two-day deals -- like you, yes. What does that element of it mean, do you think?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: It's life-changing money, okay. Obviously \$500,000, you can put a down payment on a house. You can put the down payment on two houses. Some players, like might not make that money ever in their career.

So it's definitely, you play for them, too. It's an ongoing joke we have in our locker room, like we say we play for the young guys because this money will mean a lot to them. But it really means a lot to everybody because it's a lot of money.

But for me, I don't think. I try not to think about the money, which no, it's accurate -- it's not accurate what I'm saying. I think about the money but I think about the money when we talk about the young guys.

Personally, I try not to think about the money. For the game, I love playing basketball. I don't love playing basketball any more for the money and because I don't like to lie. When I came to the league, obviously you want to take care of your family. You want to send your brothers to better school than you went to. You want to create a better life for your parents, boy your mom a house, you know, all the stories about all the athletes.

But at one point if that's what motivates you, you won't go

far. There's got to be something within you that wakes you up every single day to go and put your body through this stress, you know that we put our bodies through, it's just creating more art. It's creating more moments that I can remember. Creating more legacy for myself or something that my kids can look back to and say, "Damn, my dad was a bad MF'er when he used to play."

But I totally understand this is life-changing opportunity for all the young players within our team, and some people need this. And not just for the young people. Not just the young players, the coaches, too. Coaches, physios. Some people, it would change their life.

So yeah, you know, we've got to -- not just for that but I want to win. That's why I play. But that's extra motivation, also; that I know that if we win the game, a lot of people are going to benefit from it.

Q. So the NBA is growing globally. And bring the NBA Cup on an international stage, how does it contribute to the growth of the NBA all over the world, also in Africa and to the commitment of the NBA to having an international and diverse audience?

GIANNIS ANTETOKOUNMPO: First of all, the league is growing, not just because of the NBA Cup. It's growing because there's a lot of talent coming from overseas. Like you can see the last couple of years, the No. 1 picks, both were from France, if I'm not mistaken.

And you see, like some of the best players in the league today, the last couple of years, they are not American. Even Shai, I think Shai is Canadian, right, Jokic, Luka, Wemby. So the game is becoming like even more like -- I think it's at its best that it's ever been with more international.

I love this system, this play, NBA Cup system. It was my first time going to watch the Euroleague Final Four this year in Berlin, and you could see, like it was two games, Semifinal and Final, and how much it mean to the teams, to the atmosphere. It was incredible, the attention to it, the pressure that we had.

So I love that the NBA kind of adapted this system, like within the -- within the regular season you have games that means more, but when you come here, you have two games that brings a lot of attention to basketball, to the NBA, to the teams and teams have opportunity to kind of make something happen. You know, because not necessarily always the best NBA team going to win the Cup. It's who going to play the best basketball in those knockout games, kind of, which I love.

And the NBA has figured out ways to bring more attention to the game, and the NBA Cup is an example of that.

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