

Emirates NBA Cup

Monday, December 16, 2024

Milwaukee Bucks

Damian Lillard

Finals Practice Day



Q. Damian, this game can be framed as the experienced, aging Milwaukee Bucks against the young, ascending Oklahoma City Thunder and one of the teams that's got next. Does that add to any of the vibe and motivation on your guys' parts in a turf sense?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I don't think so. I mean, we all -- they made it to the Cup final and we made it to the Cup final. I don't think it's any deeper than that. They have been a good team for some years now. They are not new to it. These guys have been top of the West I think the last three years.

It's just two good teams from both sides playing in a championship with a Cup. Obviously they are a younger team than we are. But they win games. They are a good team. We win games. We're a good team.

It just comes down to one game, and that's it. I don't think nobody, at least with us, is looking at it like, Oh, we old and all that and they young. I don't think nobody on our side is looking at it like that.

Q. Historically the NBA season obviously is sort of like a slow build toward the playoffs and you guys are all pretty used to that rhythm. You've obviously had a ton of playoff experience. What's it like to have to sort of do that ramp-up process now several times throughout the season and do it quite quickly, I guess, once you guys are still finding your rhythm as a team?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I like it. I think it provides excitement for us as players and excitement for the fans. It's something on the line before you get to the playoffs. I think it just brings out the best in us.

You get in these Cup games where the floor is different. The uniform is different. You know that we're playing for something. There's a prize at the end, obviously, a trip to Vegas and ultimately just an opportunity to win something as a team.

What that can do for the morale of a team, how connected

a team is. Having to do it in December, I think it is definitely an opportunity for a team to gain some momentum and do something that requires a lot of trust in the team to be connected to accomplish early in the season so that you can continue to build on it.

Q. You're having the most efficient season of your career in terms of shooting. Last year you talked about going to Milwaukee and new team but mostly new life.

DAMIAN LILLARD: Yeah.

Q. How much do you think that your adaptation, this new thing for you, has to do with you shooting so well and Milwaukee Bucks ramping up and being here now?

DAMIAN LILLARD: Obviously I play a part in it. For our team to be successful, I've got to be a good version of myself.

Coming into the second year, having a better understanding of who I'm playing with, coming back knowing who I'm playing for, having that time, as well, with Doc last year and just being able to step away from last season and get my life in order and then also have the time to properly prepare. Getting healthy, getting my training in and having my mind right coming back into the season was all it really was for me.

When we lost in the playoffs last year, I said it right after the game, like you know, people will see. I thought I had a good season last year. If you look at anybody else that had the line that I had last season, they would probably say, oh, he had a career year. But it was a down year for me, and I thought I had a good line and we were a top-three team in the East pretty much the entire season.

But personally, I knew that I had more to give. I knew what it took for me to be able to come back and do that. I did what I did to prepare for the season. I've come back and I've just done what I knew I would do. I just needed to prepare for it and have my life in order to put myself in position to do it, and I've done that.



Q. You were MVP of the most defense-optional All-Star Game ever last season.

DAMIAN LILLARD: Hey.

Q. No disrespect. You were deserved MVP, obviously.

DAMIAN LILLARD: None taken.

Q. None was meant. When Adam came out at the Mexico City game and said, we're going to change it again, and it's got to be sometime soon, they are telling us it's going to go to the team format like the rookie-sophomore game, what do you think that's going to mean, if anything? Do guys want it to change? Does it matter? No matter what the format is, are you just going to try to win it for what it is? How will going to that tournament format that night do, if it goes that way?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I don't know. We're going to have to see. I understand what's being attempted. You want to create some type of competitiveness in that game on Sunday. You want to try to mix it up to try to find a way to make it more entertaining. We'll see.

I'm definitely more a fan of, like, the originality. I think being able to play on Sunday is a special thing. The top players get to do it. Not everybody has that experience. One side of me is like, why? Why change it?

But I think just like this NBA Cup, there's some incentive in there for people to get after it earlier in the season and try to get something done. So I think that's a possible route for that, as well. We'll see. I know they switched it up a little bit this year, and we'll see how it goes.

Q. Doc said you were held out. How do you feel and what are you feeling in your calf right now?

DAMIAN LILLARD: Like the second quarter of the game against Atlanta, I just kind of irritated it a little bit. So it was just some discomfort. When I have something with my calf, sometimes I start panicking. But I knew it wasn't nothing serious. Just a little irritation.

So I've just been doing treatment and doing all the stuff to try to get ahead of it and just get ready for tomorrow.

Q. So you are thinking you can be or might be good to go, or you have to --

DAMIAN LILLARD: No, I'm playing. I'm playing.

Q. You guys are getting Khris kind of back into the

mix of things. He's obviously the trigger man on inbound plays, and helps out a lot in the clutch. What has it been like trying to bring him back into the fold when you and Giannis have found such a good groove together?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I think it's been pretty simple. Just being a vet, I know any time you miss a significant amount of time, you really need a period to get your body used to being on the floor, playing at this pace, the physicality, your conditioning, your timing. There's going to be some rust there, I think.

With Khris being such a smart player, he's going to find a way to be effective. The trust and chemistry that he has with Giannis, he's going to be able to find his spots and ways to be effective on our team. Being able to shoot the ball helps, as well, his size. All of those things help him transition back a little bit easier.

I think for us, it's just not thinking about it too much. You know, trying to overly incorporate him and involve him and all that stuff. He's smart enough to find his way into it, and obviously we're going to have a lot of opportunity for him. He's going to handle the ball in playmaking positions.

Like you said, he's going to be our inbounder. He's going to be involved to where the opportunity will be there, but we're not going to like try to force it or nothing like that. I think we've got a good thing going.

We've figured out a lot of things. I don't think he's someone we need to overly help or be concerned with working him in. I think it will happen organically.

I think that's what's happening right now. He's slowly building himself right back into it. But you see him with the ball in his hands and getting opportunities, and I think we just let it happen that way.

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