

Emirates NBA Cup

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

Milwaukee Bucks

Damian Lillard

Championship Postgame



Milwaukee Bucks 97, Oklahoma City Thunder 81

Q. Obviously there's been a lot of questions this week about what will it mean when you do win the NBA Cup. So now that you've done it, what does that mean to you and what are you feeling right now?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I feel happy. Like I said, it was something we wanted to win and just being in something like this, the second year, I feel that teams cared about it a little bit more. I think teams played with a little bit more pride about trying to reach Vegas and having an opportunity to win at the end.

For us to be back again and then we end up playing against a younger team, a hungry team, No. 1 in the West and they defend well and they do everything well. They have got a good team, well-coached. I just thought the way we played as a group and how we were able to do it was what felt the best. Everybody did their job. We defended. We played well from the start of the game all the way through the finish. I think it just showed what we've been building. I think it all came out in our biggest game to this point. It all came out from the film room to practice to us becoming a more connected team, the trust on both sides of the ball. I think it shined bright in a really important game for us. I think that's what felt the best.

Obviously, the experience winning something. I've had a lot of experience individually where I've had accomplishments and stuff, but to have some team success and win something and be the last team standing in this tournament, it feels great.

Q. How much does this fully flush that poor start, and how determined did you against Giannis was to win this thing and get that MVP?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I wouldn't say it completely flushes it because we can't get those games back. That's why it's important to not take games for granted, because you look back at the schedule and you look back at four or five games we feel like we should have won. I don't think you can flush it, but we've shown the team we started the

season as is not the team that we are now, and it was never who we truly were. Just got off to a tough start.

I don't think the tournament or the Cup was something that Giannis was just determined to win. I think that's just who he is. He's a determined person and player. Just the background that he comes from. His journey to becoming the superstar that he is is a tough one.

So when you get to this point, you don't want to stop. You've got to keep fighting for your position and where you've come. I think that's who he is and that's why he goes about things the way he does.

Q. What was the key in that second half? You seemed to pull away from them and almost exert your dominance, really, in the second half.

DAMIAN LILLARD: I think we just sustained how we started the game when we had success. We kept showing them crowds. We didn't leave each other out to dry. We were in help positions. We hit bodies and rebounded. We didn't give them second and third opportunities like they kill teams when they crash the glass. We got back. We executed offensively.

Our spacing was good. When they loaded up on the ball, we got the ball out. We swung when we needed to swing. We attacked when we needed to attack. We got quality shots.

Over the course of the season, we've had lapses over the course of a game. I think tonight we kept our focus collectively. I think because of that, we were able to run off with the game.

Q. Is this in any way a message in your minds towards other teams in the East what you guys are capable of?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I wouldn't say a message. I would say it was more for us, for us to go out there and be the team that we know we are. If we go out there and do the small things, we play together, we share the ball, make the right play, we trust our scouting report and our defensive coverages and our scheme, the more we able to put that together possession after possession and sustain it over



48 minutes, a lot of our games should look the way this one looked, especially when you're not playing against an elite team like them.

So that's what it is for us. We don't need to send nobody a message. We need to focus on ourselves. When you get on the floor, you send a message on the floor each night. You're going to focus on what people see, not what we're doing or nothing.

Q. Giannis said the chemistry between you guys is evolving and is going to continue to evolve. What has that process been like and tonight how important was winning at a high-stake level to grow that chemistry?

DAMIAN LILLARD: I think it's one of those things where people wanted to put me with Giannis and think it was just going to be perfect right away because we've both been high-level players.

But I come from a situation where I've always had the ball, and he's had a decade of him having the ball and playing a certain way.

So I think time is the No. 1 thing. It just took time for us to get to know each other better as people. You can't just trust somebody that you're paired with when you don't really know who they are, how they think and how they operate.

So I think time has helped us. We've got a lot of reps playing in games together. I'm getting to watch him and listen to him talk so I can see where his head is and vice versa. He's been able to see that.

It's just grown over time. You get to know somebody. You spend a lot of time around them. We spend more time around our team than we do our family over the seven, eight months. So you get to know each other.

We've had a lot of dialogue through text. Vin Baker is always getting us together before practice, after practice, talking about two-man actions that we can get into that teams will have a hard time with, stuff like that.

Then you get in these situations where we might be in a late-game moment and he'll see me come through for him. It might be a game where we're down and he'll start dominating and he'll come through for me.

I think when you see how well we can balance each other out and I see the luxury that it is to have him as a teammate and he sees luxury it is to have me as a teammate, and as a player, once both sides see that, you just start to have more trust in it and you get confidence in

it. And then in a game like tonight where you said the stakes are high, for us, nothing changes because that trust has been developed, and we've seen it.

Q. Obviously one of the unique kind of aspects of this tournament is the prize money. I was just curious, at any point was that a motivating factor for you? At any point during the game tonight, did you think about the fact that you get bonus money if you won this game?

DAMIAN LILLARD: No, I didn't think about it in the game. I was just thinking like, man, I was looking up at the time and I realized the game was pretty much over. I was like man, this is going to be cool to actually win something as a team. So I was excited about that.

But as far as the money, I just was, you look at our team, we got a lot of young guys on our team. In the NBA, in my experience, I've been in the league 13 years now. There's been a lot of young guys that I played with that were in the league one year, gone. In the league two years, gone. Or overseas or they just don't play no more.

So the opportunity that this is for a lot of our young players is not lost on me. What it could mean for them and their families and some of their kids. It's a great thing for them.

So when it came to that, that was like my No. 1 -- that was my No. 1 thing was just knowing how much it's going to mean to some of our young guys.

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