

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Wednesday, June 5, 2024

Dallas Mavericks

Kyrie Irving

Media Day



Q. Kyrie, did you see what LeBron said yesterday?

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, I did. Is that the first question (smiling)? Oh, God, I love it. Got to love this, man.

Q. Obviously you two have said over the last couple years that you miss playing with each other. For him to come out and say yesterday not only how well you are playing but that he misses being your teammate, how do you react to that?

KYRIE IRVING: I mean, I have a great reaction. It's appreciated. There's a lot of gratitude there, as well.

Obviously, I'm in a different age, different place in my life. So is he. I think we both have been able to mature and really appreciate what we got a chance to accomplish.

I think there were some things that got in the way of our relationship when I was a little bit younger. Now that I'm able to vocalize how I feel as a man, be comfortable in it, stand on my square, my beliefs, where I'm coming from, I feel like our relationship's different because of that now.

Definitely miss him. Playing out there, just making things easier, being able to run up and down the floor, just throw the ball to somebody like that, throw it in the air, as athletic as they come.

Yeah, just a mutual respect there for what we brought to the table. His leadership, my leadership style, I think it meshed very well. I was learning a lot from him that I'm appreciative for the rest of my life.

Man, when he says comments like that, I think back to us having those moments where we're down in a series, up in a series, we're really demanding greatness from each other. Off the court, our families meshing well.

I definitely think about those times. Now we're here in the present where we're able to reflect but also now I'm at this stage, able to use some of the formulas that I was taught

from him, some of the great teachers that have come before me. I feel like I've been built for this moment because I've gone through some of the things I've gone through in my past with some of the guys that have transcended the game.

Shout-out to LeBron for that. Knows how to stir up a media storm, get everybody in here talking about us.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to the future and getting this series started now.

Q. You mentioned the things you've been through. Seven years since your last NBA Finals, third different team since then. How are you going to apply all the experiences you had since the highs of three straight Finals to this time? Did you recognize maybe over that period of time just how rare and how fleeting an opportunity like this can be, to compete for the championship?

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, I mean, it is a fleeting feeling, to be real with you. There's so many peers of mine that have spent long years in the NBA trying to make it to the NBA Finals, Western Conference Finals, Eastern Conference Finals. Have gotten very close or almost struggled or strived every year to get back.

I had a chance to do it in my fourth year, my fifth year, my sixth year. When I look back at those memories, never regretful of how I treated it, but a little disappointed on how I approached just that success. I wanted to be able to enjoy it and take a breather, really take in the moment.

You're in the middle of a 76-year history. I'm in the middle of a 76-year history now, but then we were in years of history. The NBA is very young still as a business. When you ascend to this level, put in a lot of hard work, you beat some of the best in the world, competing with some of the best in the world. I looked at it as, oh I'm going to be here every single year. At this age I've been through what I've been through, been able to come out on the other side. I look at it as an opportunity that I don't want to take for granted. I want it to last as long as possible emotionally just because of how much it took to get here.



These young guys are very hungry. They want a championship. I want a championship. So our feelings are very mutual. But I've always reminded them that this is a process. Failure is going to be part of this, too. Get it out your mind that this is about to be a clean sweep or everything is about to feel good throughout this journey and all that. I'm just very real, very honest.

That's what's helped me grow as a leader, accepting what I can't control, and what I can't, letting it lay to the wayside. Letting that go, how it's going to go, that's life. Basketball has been a great teacher for me, but life has been an even better one.

Using those same principles I've learned in life apply to basketball has allowed me to connect to my teammates better. There's no silent treatment that's coming randomly throughout the year because I don't know how to emotionalize or vocalize how I'm feeling. Some of the things I struggled with as a young player, I've now been able to accept this is what comes with being in this position. Taking on the pressure. Then also teaching my teammates how to get through it. Also look them to teach mere.

Just staying a student and enjoying the craft, man.

Q. Just wanted to ask you, what has your relationship with God Shammgod meant to you and how has it helped you succeed with this organization?

KYRIE IRVING: Man, shot out to God Shammgod. He's been imperative in just helping me grow, enjoying the game every single day, competing. I feel like he's just one of my uncles just from Harlem, New York, that's there to give me a little s--- when I need it but be honest all the time. Remind me this is bigger than basketball.

Shout-out to God Shammgod. He's helped me a lot this year, been there every single day to help work me out. Also inspire the next generation. He does it in his own way. I'm just following his footsteps, just like other uncles of mine who have done great things in this world.

Q. What is it like playing against some of your former brothers, teammates now on this stage? Also, seems like you did a good job of tuning out the crowd last time you played here. Is that something you're thinking about? Is there a key to doing that no matter what they say to you?

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, I mean, I've experienced Boston twofold: my first few years being in the NBA playing for the Cavs, then coming here to Boston, then being right down the street in Brooklyn, now being here in the Finals playing

against them in a potential four-to-seven-game series.

You just got to breathe through it. To all my youngins out there that are dealing with some of the crowd reactions, what they're saying to you, you have to breathe, realize that is not as hostile as you think it is. Don't overthink it.

Been able to work through that and understand that some of that is anxiety, some of that is nervousness. It could all be turned into a strength. There's no fear out here, man. It's basketball. The fans are going to say what they're going to say. I appreciate them and their relationship they have to the game. But it's about the players at the end of the day.

Then the first question was? Oh, playing against my former brothers. Yeah, no, I'm excited. They've gotten tremendously better. They've led their team to this point. So I'm proud of them. I'm looking forward to the competition because this is what we've all strived for since we were kids, basketball at this level playing against the best of the best.

They have a great team over there, led by a great coach. So we're going to be in for a great series, hard, tough series. They're going to give us their best. I know they're not going to slow down when they see me. They're going to come at me even more.

This is what I've been preparing for since last summer or when our season ended last year of putting in the time to prepare for moments like this.

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