

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Thursday, June 6, 2024

Boston Celtics

Jayson Tatum

Game 1: Postgame

Boston Celtics 107, Dallas Mavericks 89

Q. Jayson, you talked about in the wake of the 2022 NBA Finals how much it just sat with you, and you thought about it for what has turned out to be years until you got back to this stage. I know it's only one game, but sort of exorcising those demons in Game 1, getting back there, getting out there, how did that feel?

JAYSON TATUM: It felt great. To be honest, I was nervous. I ain't going to lie. I was nervous in like an anxious way, as like a little kid. It's surreal being in The Finals. When you're young, I guess, in your career, you think you're always going to go back. Last year was kind of like a wake-up call when we didn't make it.

So getting back to this point and being here is really a big deal. We played well tonight. There's a lot of things we feel like we could do better. But it definitely does feel good to win the first game. But we know that two years ago we won the first game and the outcome of that series. So we still have a lot of work to do.

Q. You guys were able to get through the Heat and the Cavs and the Pacers without Kristaps Porzingis, but what did he mean to getting past the Mavs tonight?

JAYSON TATUM: I mean, you always want to have your team at full strength. We're a good team when guys are down, but we're really, really special when we have everybody. I said it earlier, how seamless his transition was after being away for six, seven weeks, and coming into the game and having a first half like that, that was a big spark for us to start the game.

Q. You know more than anybody how important health is this time of year with everything that happened to you in Game 7 last year against Miami with the ankle --

JAYSON TATUM: Thanks for reminding me.

Q. Sorry about that. With Kristaps coming back



tonight, does it just feel like you all are a complete unit that -- with everything lining up with the way that he protects the rim and can play in the middle of the floor that this is what has been envisioned from the start of the season?

JAYSON TATUM: Yeah, I think you guys got a pretty clear picture of that throughout the season, when we were healthy for most of that and how we played and how effective we were on both ends. KP had a big hand in that and the success that we had this season.

Obviously, getting hurt in the playoffs, we had to figure it out. We had to adjust and play different lineups and whatever. 12-2 up to that point, we did a really good job. But it is a relief to have him back because we know we're a much better team when he's back.

Q. Obviously having KP back is big, but Al Horford has provided a really strong presence down low throughout the post-season here. Can you talk about his ability to kind of mold his game in order to take on different roles for this team on any given basis?

JAYSON TATUM: Yeah, and they go hand in hand. Al has stepped up into that starting role and at this stage in his career being a, you know, center piece of us getting to The Finals is something that shouldn't be overlooked. His presence out there on both ends of the floor, what he allows us to do offensively, dragging out the big men. You know, and we have had playoff games where Al has hit six, seven threes. Even if he doesn't, you have to, the other team has to respect him as a shooter, so it just helps with our spacing. So, can't give Al enough credit for the impact that he's had on this playoff run.

Q. What has impressed you the most about the way Jaylen has used all of the criticism that he's received over the years and all of the doubt he has received over the years as motivation to become the player he is today?

JAYSON TATUM: Yeah, I think when you look at JB, he's somebody that has really worked on his craft year after year to just become a better player. I think you can tell by the way that the game has slowed down for him and the

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way he's making reads on the offensive end. That doesn't happen just overnight, it's a process. And I've seen it, I've seen the work that he puts in and watching film and things like that. So it's special to see when guys put in the work and it translates to on the court.

Q. More Jaylen questions. He really was a big part of the response of their big run in the second half, doing it on both ends, being hyper aggressive at the rim on both ends. How have you seen Jaylen really grow into, like, knowing, like when's the moment for him to bring that aggressiveness and that energy and how does that change the game in the big ones?

JAYSON TATUM: Yeah, I think just, being his teammate for seven years, we've been in so many big games, we've been in so many big moments, and just always being there to answer the call in those moments, especially on both ends of the floor.

Q. Can you explain the beginning of the third quarter, when they went on their big run, what was going wrong for you guys and what was the process of trying to figure that out and turn it around?

JAYSON TATUM: I think our offense got a little stagnant and it had a lot to do with our spacing. They kind of put us into some bad ways on offense which kind of threw off our spacing and slowed us down. They started to get stops, running in transition, but that's part of it. They're going to make shots. That's a really good team over there. We just did a great job of responding in realtime after Joe called that timeout. They cut it to eight, we came to the bench and talked about it, executed and made plays and took the lead back up.

Q. Considering what's at stake, how do you manage to use the responsibility and pressure to your advantage and keep playing, having fun on the court, doing what you love and living the dream?

JAYSON TATUM: Just staying present, staying in the moment. Like I said, I was, in a positive way, I was nervous before the game. I was like a kid first day of school. I know how exciting and big of a deal all of this is, so just finding a space to enjoy the moment and have fun playing basketball.

Q. How special is this group when it comes to individual defenders and what you guys are able to do in those one-on-one matchups and what that does for the collective defense?

JAYSON TATUM: Something that we have harped on all season, what makes our team really special is we don't

have guys that we hide on defense. Bigs and guards, we switch, we take on the challenge of individual defense. Understanding that we have help, it's a team sport, we all got to be on the same page, but we're not showing or anything like that, because that could kind of compromise your defense. And, essentially, like, if you want to play on our team you have to be able to guard, and everybody knows that.

Q. Obviously Kristaps Porzingis has been out for over a month. You watched him scrimmage leading into this game, did you have any idea that he would come out firing the way that he did after such a long layoff?

JAYSON TATUM: I don't want to say like -- I didn't doubt him, but I just, you know, coming off an injury and missing that much time, it normally takes guys a little longer than that, but as somebody as tall and talented as he is, he makes it look really easy.

Q. You mentioned some of the changes in terms of your perspective and still have the butterflies or kind of a little nervous anxiety before the game. What kind of changed during the course of time that put you into a place where you are able to take things in a little bit more and what does that mean to you to be able to kind of take in all that is the Finals?

JAYSON TATUM: Maybe last year, us losing in the Conference Finals. Maybe I just expected that after we lost in 2022 that it was guaranteed that we were just going to keep coming back, and this is like our time. Last year it was just kind of a wake-up call to not take anything for granted, because you never know how many opportunities that you might have.

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