

# NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Sunday, June 9, 2024

**Rudy Tomjanovich**

**Rick Carlisle**

**David Fogel**

Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award



2009. The first Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award winner was Tom Heinsohn, who was the guy that originated the Coaches Association back in the early '70s, followed by Jack Ramsay, Tex Winter, Lenny Wilkens, Pat Riley, Bill Fitch, Bernie Bickerstaff, Dick Motta, K.C. Jones, Jerry Sloan, Al Attles, Hubie Brown, Frank Layden, Del Harris, Larry Brown, Mike Fratello, Rick Adelman and, of course, Rudy this year.

DAVID FOGEL: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We are excited to be in Boston for Game 2 of the NBA Finals and to present the 2024 Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award.

On behalf of Coaches Association President Rick Carlisle and all of our great NBA head and assistant coaches, I would like to thank Commissioner Silver, Mark Tatum, Kathy Behrens, Mike Bass, Byron Spruell, Michael Levine, Tim Frank, Paul Benedict, Mark Broussard and the entire NBA for all of the league support and assistance in providing this platform to honor the extraordinary achievements of our great NBA coaches.

We are especially proud of the Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award, which honors the memory of Hall of Famer Chuck Daly, who over an outstanding career set the standard for integrity, competitive excellence and tireless promotion of NBA basketball.

Chuck was an incredible mentor to so many coaches and players in our league, including Coach Carlisle and Coach Tomjanovich.

With that, I would like to turn it over to Coach Carlisle. Thank you.

RICK CARLISLE: Thanks, David. Adam, thanks again. This is just such a wonderful opportunity each year to honor basketball royalty.

I first want to thank our selection committee: Bernie Bickerstaff, Billy Cunningham, Joe Dumars, Phil Jackson, Gregg Popovich, Pat Riley, Donnie Walsh and Lenny Wilkens. These eight committee members have been with us through the 16-year history of this. I think this is our 17th year.

The winners of this award over the years, it began here in

Of all the recipients that we've had for this award, I don't think we've ever had someone whose profile was so similar to Chuck Daly's himself. Both Rudy and Chuck were back-to-back NBA championship winners. They both were Olympic gold medalist coaches.

Interestingly, Rudy one-upped Chuck a little bit. He has a media cooperation award named after him that was established in 2011. And Rudy told me it used to be the Chuck Daly/Rudy Tomjanovich Award, and somehow it just shifted and now it's only Rudy. So that's pretty cool.

But both Chuck and Rudy are guys that were beloved, unconditionally respected within the coaching profession, and guys that were able to get the very, very best out of a wide range of different kind of players and were so great and made so many people feel special and made the players that they coached feel special.

I want to recognize Sam Cassell, who is in the back. Sam was, I think, on both back-to-back teams in Houston. Hit the big shot against New York the first year, I remember that, in the Garden. He'll be coaching tonight. We tried to see if he can come out on the court for us for the award ceremony, but he's got a job to do over there so we can't pry him away. But appreciate you being here.

Rudy also authored one of the great postgame comments in NBA history. I want to make sure I get this right: "Don't ever underestimate the heart of a champion."

So it gives me great pleasure, great privilege to introduce Rudy Tomjanovich as this year's recipient of the Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award.

RUDY TOMJANOVICH: Thank you very much. I want to thank Rick, David and the Coaches Association for this



honor, the guys on that selection committee. If you had a poll of my favorite guys, all those coaches.

The great thing about this award is it came to me out of the blue. I had no idea I was up for this. I happened to be with my son up in Houston when I got the call and Rick started telling me about it.

I got emotional. My son kept asking, "Are you okay? Are you okay?"

Then he told me what the award stood for, and finally I hung up, and I told him, "No, everything's great."

And then I did cry. The reason is, when something like this happens, I'm not thinking about the championships. I'm not thinking about all the good stuff. I'm thinking about the dark days, the days when I doubted myself.

You know, much like the coach here in Boston, I got a job out of the blue. Didn't know what was going to happen. It was offered to me. I didn't know if I had what it takes to be a coach. I am not a confrontational guy. How is it going to work?

I had an assistant coach, Carroll Dawson. Man, he just said, "Rudy, if you don't take it, we're out of a job." And I needed the job (laughter).

RICK CARLISLE: That's pressure.

RUDY TOMJANOVICH: And he said, "I promise you, I will give you everything I've got." And he did.

Now, a little bit got lost in the translation because he's really country and I'm really city. He would say some words like "yonder" and stuff like that. But we came up with a system for the players we had, and that's my philosophy as a coach. You don't keep the same plays every year; you change it for the talent you have.

And of course we had Hakeem Olajuwon. I would not be here if I did not have his cooperation and his belief. He was fantastic and a classy guy. I had great players on that team. Every time I see them -- I see Sam. I'm looking for the day that Sam Cassell is a head coach, and I want to see him cussing at players the way I cussed at him.

The other thing I want to say is I made a lot of good moves. I made some crazy moves. I traded Robert Horry twice. But I really believe he belongs in the Naismith Hall of Fame. He's proven it time and time again. He's made so many teams champions playing a role, and that's so important. It isn't about just the stats. It's about getting results. I pray that one day he's going to be able to stand

up there and accept that honor.

I want to thank the owners that had confidence in me to run their teams: Charlie Thomas, Les Alexander and Jerry Buss. But especially the players. Then of course my assistant coaches. I still talk to my assistant coaches. We're like brothers. We still talk basketball.

Having Carroll with me, just think about being in a high-pressure job with your older brother sitting right next to you. So that brought me a lot of comfort.

I'm just blessed to be here. Thank you, guys.

RICK CARLISLE: If I could, I just want to mention something that happened earlier today. Rudy had a thing to go speak to NBA Entertainment. We went over to the JW Marriott and went down to this huge room, and it was really interesting to me. You see the NBA Entertainment people here and there and around the building, but there was a group of over a hundred people that were together. There were whiteboards with all kind of stuff written: Stay on this guy, this could happen. It was like an unbelievable thing.

Rudy spoke to these people today, and it gave, really, a unique perspective. He was fantastic.

I also want to mention Rudy's girlfriend, Lisa Marcussen, is here as well. So thank you for being here.

I know we have some questions.

**Q. It's been nearly 30 years since you and the Rockets won that back-to-back championship, and "don't ever underestimate the heart of a champion" still resonates within the sport, I think probably beyond the sport. It's something that people allude to in pro sports and even in day-to-day life. What do you remember about the inspiration of the quote, and how has it enriched your life?**

RUDY TOMJANOVICH: The truth behind it is it came from Kevin Johnson of the Phoenix Suns, who said, "The Rockets have the heart of a champion. That's why they beat us." They had us down a couple years, and we fought back and won that series.

Now, Charles (Barkley) had another quote. He said, "They're like those damned Texas roaches; you step on them and you think they are dead, and they scurry away." I thought I would pick his better than, you know (laughter).

**Q. How much pride do you take when you look back at some of the guys that are working hard now, like**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**Dennis Lindsey and Mike Wells, guys that started in your film room and places like that that now have become integral parts --**

RICK CARLISLE: Jim Boylen.

**Q. Jim Boylen, another great one -- that have become such integral parts of their teams?**

RUDY TOMJANOVICH: Yeah, we all started in the film room. I was in the film room for Bill Fitch. In fact, I have to give Bill Fitch so much credit. He worked my butt. I'm telling you, if I had a smile on my face, "You need some more to do." I did the video. I broke down the video. I did the scouting report. I did the walk-through and the college scouting. That's five people's jobs right there.

But it prepared me to be a solid coach. I need stuff like that. When I don't have stuff to do, my mind wanders. I get in trouble when I start thinking too much.

RICK CARLISLE: Rudy and I both worked for Coach Fitch. Coach Fitch told me the story that he used to have Rudy, when Rudy first started as an assistant coach, in the visiting arenas, he would go to the top of the arena with a camera. Bill called it the wide angle. Bill always wanted to have the wide angle in case there was some kind of incident that happened that the TV cameras wouldn't quite get.

If you can envision a guy who is a future Hall of Famer as a coach, and probably should be as a player as well, up at the top of ARCO Arena in Sacramento, with a small video cam, filming the game as it's going on, and Carroll Dawson was the only guy on the bench at the time.

RUDY TOMJANOVICH: That's right.

RICK CARLISLE: Talk about paying your dues, pretty amazing.

**Q. You were down 3-2 in the 1994 NBA Finals and going home against the Knicks. What was your mindset then? And one of your great qualities, to my way of thinking, is just awesome patience with your players. Can you talk about both of those?**

RUDY TOMJANOVICH: I remember as we pulled into Hobby Airport, which is a small airport in Houston, the fans were there at 3:00 in the morning. That inspiration was unbelievable.

But I stopped at the front of the plane and I said, "Guys, if I told you all we had to do was win two home games and we would be world champions, wouldn't you think that's a heck

of a good deal?"

Then we played a hell of a team. Maybe the worst team for us to match up with, with New York, because they had all the big guys, and this was an era where there was a lot of rustling and bumping. Good defense was bump the guy at halfcourt, bump him at the top of the key.

So we had to come up with a strategy because at that time, we were sort of what I call a one primary scorer in Hakeem, and I relied on him so much.

What we did is we started our offense on the other side. They were automatically double-teaming our guards, and the guy who was guarding Hakeem had to run all the way on the other side and pick up the roller. Then his job was going to be to throw it around the horn and get it into him. But while that guy was rotating, the guy who was double-teaming the ball had to run back. He's not getting beat up.

I had to save that guy because it was a tag-team deal. They just kept bringing another body. Then we think about at the end of the game, Game 6, here he is, Hakeem has the energy at the end of the game to block that shot, get his hand on (John) Starks' shot.

In the next game, I think he played 42 minutes in the final game. I used the guy so much. I don't think he could do it now. The computers would all start blowing up: You've got to take him out.

**Q. You were a superstar player. Most superstar players do not wind up going into coaching, and they certainly don't start at the ground floor. So how and why did you fall in love with coaching?**

RUDY TOMJANOVICH: I like being an assistant coach. I love helping people. I love the game. I cannot tell you what basketball did for me. I mean, I was from a very poor family. My parents were not educated. My father went to the second grade. My mother went to the sixth grade.

They were so shy. I didn't even know how to sit at a table and have a meal because we only had one table and we only had two chairs. So I was so behind as far as being socially compatible with the world.

But basketball, I started playing that game, and luckily for me, in my hometown, which is in the middle of Detroit, at our junior high, all the great players in that area would come and play there because we had an L-shaped recessed pole because you get killed playing in Detroit with a straight pole, and I got to play basketball there.

If you guys got time, I'll tell you a little bit about my other sport. I played baseball as a kid. Was an All-Star. Played against the greatest Little League player of all time. Art "Pinky" Deras, Hamtramck, Michigan, in 1959, went to Williamsport and won. So that's what we did.

I had an uncle, my cousin who played second base, he said, "You've got to have a game plan. You ain't going to college unless you get a scholarship. Your family doesn't have it."

So we had a plan. Baseball was going to be it.

I didn't love baseball, even though I was good at it. For some reason, I loved basketball. But in junior high, I never played one second. I got in against the teachers. I had the French teacher isolated. I shook him. I shot it. Air ball. (Laughter) That was my junior high career.

So when I told my uncle I was quitting baseball, he says, "What about our plan?"

I said, "I'm going to do basketball."

He says, "Rudy, you're an All-Star in baseball. You sit on the bench."

I said, "I'm going to go out for the team."

So I go out for the freshman team, and a day before the cut, one of my buddies said, "Hey, man. I'm in the coach's home room. I saw the list. You ain't on the list."

I said, "Are you on the list?"

He said, "Yes."

I went, "I'm better than you."

Now, the coach was an ex-University of Michigan linebacker who knew nothing about basketball. He just took the job to make some extra bucks.

So me being a shy kid, I would never approach somebody, but I wanted to play basketball so I challenged the guy, before he could announce the cut, to a one-on-one game.

He thought every dribble was a fumble. So he would dive on the ball, knock me down. I jump over, I put it in and I won the game. He gave me a jersey and I got to play. That was the worst freshman team in the history of our school. But I had the bug.

At that playground, at that junior high, Detroit Pistons came there. Mel Daniels, college All-American, I played against

him there. That's where I learned the game. I was so lucky. But like I said, social skills, when I think about I'm a coach and I've gone up and I get so locked up trying to give a speech.

In fact, I think I was telling Rick, when I was in junior high, this teacher said, "Man, you need to get out of your shell. You need to run for class president."

I said, "Oh, no, that's not me."

I didn't know how to do a speech and all that. I go up to the microphone, I'm so nervous. I grab my fingers and crack my knuckles into the mic and everyone starts laughing. It was the most embarrassing thing.

I had a sadistic friend that wouldn't let them stop. He brought it (the sound volume) up and the roars kept going. I said, "I'm never going to speak to anybody again."

To think that I'm up here doing this stuff. The long road it took, that journey. But basketball was the vehicle, man. Basketball does so much. All sports do it. I just feel lucky as hell.

**Q. I am curious about Pinky and whatever happened to his baseball career. But more importantly, I wanted to ask you about Sam Cassell, I don't know if you dreamed of him going into coaching, but what do you think about what he's done as a coach so far and his prospects for something bigger? But Pinky first.**

RUDY TOMJANOVICH: Pinky, we had nicknames in our city. It was a Polish city. So we had a girl who went to Wimbledon at a very young age. Her name was Peaches Bartkowicz. What was so wonderful, I'm so blessed that at our little park -- Hamtramck has one square mile, and we had a park there. We had a Hall of Fame tennis coach who taught at the courts there and then the Little League stuff and that was all volunteer coaches.

So Pinky, he was in the Cardinal farm system. He went up there and came back and became a policeman in the suburbs. He passed away maybe five years ago. Such a humble guy. His kids never knew what a great baseball player he was.

And then Samuel, there was something about Sam. Back then, I was a head coach, but I still thought like a scout. So I did the tapes and I did Sam first. He was like the fourth-rated point guard that year from the scouting services.

I watched Sam first. I said, "I like this guy, he's pretty damn good." And I looked at the guys ahead of him and I



said, "No, no, no, I'm going back to Sam."

I wound up watching every game of Sam's. Then we brought him in for an interview and we just clicked. He was a basketball player. He was like the guys on that court that I played. He wasn't thinking about golf then or doing this and all that; I'm a player. When he goes in the gym, he's one of the alpha guys. He's going to be in there.

We kept calling him, "Where have you visited, where have you gone?" Nobody even brought the guy in to interview him. I couldn't believe it. I think Robert might have been -- I can't remember which one was first, but those are my babies, and I want the best for them.

I was lucky the Rockets gave me the ability to make the picks. A lot of times, you have a different department doing it and it doesn't jive. It was a perfect storm. We were a family. We worked so well together. And then bringing Clyde (Drexler) back in to join Hakeem, maybe the only star that we could have made that trade for in the middle of the season because they had that relationship.

I would have said, "No, I'm going to give loyalty to these guys. I'm going to let them defend their championship." But we were so bad. We had gotten happy feet. We were losing to teams that we shouldn't, and it became available. We said, "Let's pull the trigger." And Clyde was phenomenal.

**Q. You mentioned before about being thrust into the role suddenly. What does it take to find your voice as a coach in that kind of scenario, and also, how do you get buy-in from your players and how important is it to find that balance?**

RUDY TOMJANOVICH: Well, you know, it's funny. I looked at the assets. I looked at the positive of players and I would get excited. It's like chemistry. What he can do; what this guy can do and all that and how you put that together. I loved diagramming something that not everybody is doing and put -- maybe that guy is better going left; we'll shift the floor.

First of all, treating people with respect, until they prove they don't deserve it. And I did. I just loved -- when I saw a player, it looked like all the things he could do was such an asset.

I think that that's why they felt -- they would say a player's coach. I don't know what a player's coach is. There is a separation. You have different roles and all that. As a young guy, I'm sure Joe (Mazzulla) has had to go through all that stuff, learning how to do things. Sometimes you've got to be tough.

In fact, the year that we did decide to do the trade, I had what I called two helicopter halftimes. That's when you take your coat off and you swing it around your head and you throw it and get upset. But it doesn't happen often.

So I hope that answered it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

