

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Dallas Mavericks

Kyrie Irving

Practice Day



Q. Kyrie, I know the other night after Game 2 you started talking a little bit about you've been in this situation before, down 0-2. You walked into the locker room and told the guys, We're fine. Where does that confidence come from? How do you instill that in the rest of the roster?

KYRIE IRVING: I've been saying it all year: failure is the best teacher at times. It can inspire you to do great things.

It's our first time being in the Finals as a team with this group. We understand who we're up against, the competitive level, the nature of the Finals, the competitive level we have to play at. Also, the adjustments that we have to make out there on the floor just as players.

The coaching staff is doing a great job of preparing us. But it's our job as players to make those adjustments and play even harder, especially when the game is getting a little out of balance, we have a lead and we want to extend it a little bit.

A lot of it is just a learning curve for myself, for my teammates, and also a peace of mind that we give each other that we want to give ourselves a chance by leaving it all out there on the floor, playing our best, preparing the best way we can. That's literally been the focus since Game 2 ended, was putting our best foot forward, coming back home, feeling familiar, letting our game speak for itself.

Q. How confident are you in just your own personal game, even to your own standards where you didn't want to be in Game 1 and 2?

KYRIE IRVING: First thing of that is just accepting that I haven't played well or up to my standards, as well as I would have liked.

Being back in Boston, there's such a level of desire that I have inside of me to play well. Wanted to be there for my teammates. As a competitor, it's frustrating. But I don't

want to let that seep in or spill over to any other decisions I have to make there as a player.

Continue to feed my teammates' confidence. Have been down 0-2 before -- lost a series, won a series. I know what it takes. Also how to prepare for something, like, that mentally, spiritually, emotionally, physically.

First is just respecting your opponent, then most importantly putting your best foot forward out there when we go out there. It's as simple as that.

Q. You spent a lot of time with Jaylen Brown. Talked a lot this year about the pride he's taken in improving. From your perspective watching him, how have you seen him grow?

KYRIE IRVING: He's been playing great. He's been one of the emotional leaders on the team. Defensively he's making it difficult. That's what he's been doing all year. For the past few years, he's tried to make his mark on that end.

When you take pride in what you do on the defensive end, it's going to show. I think he's been separating himself on that end.

Offensively -- to be able to do it on both ends of the floor is even more impressive. This is what makes the Finals even greater, going against somebody on that end, high energy, make it difficult. But we got to go straight at him.

Q. What didn't you like about Games 1 and 2? Was it more than missed shots? What does a much better look like for you in Game 3?

KYRIE IRVING: I mean, Games 1 and 2 is about our total team effort, how we can control a lot of the mistakes we made out there, whether it be turnovers, obviously the missed shots are going to happen. That's a basketball game.

I can be a lot more fundamentally sound, technical on my shots, not get into the paint often where it's three or four guys around me, I'm not making a pass. They're sending specific strategies against me to make it difficult.



We're at the highest stage in the world. It's a small sample size. We only get a seven-game series potentially. I just can feel the stakes being raised up a little bit more. The pressure is natural. Makes diamonds.

For us as a team, we just have to control what we can control on that end. Being able to match their pace, but also feel good about ourselves when we get stops. When we get stops, get out in transition, we're a better team. When we're getting stops and giving up offensive rebounds or we're getting stops and turning the ball over, it hurts our chances to even be in the game.

The margin of their victories hasn't really displayed the full story in terms of the Celtics beating us. We just have to continue to lean in on each other, especially when it gets tough out there. We're going against a great team. They're not going to stop pressing us, stop their pace, stop testing us on both ends of the floor.

We know what we're in for. But now we have to raise it to an even higher level, and it starts with me.

Q. The other day and now you say that it's not the first time that you are in this position. Can you tell us what you learned in 2016 that is helping you right now? What are you sharing with your teammates from that experience?

KYRIE IRVING: Sharing with them that it took a lot of resilience. It took a lot of will to win in 2016. That's also a different team.

We had time to fail together. We had time to go through our trials together. We lost in 2015. A lot of guys came back in 2016 and we won. So there was an inner motivation there. We also knew who we were going against, how well they played.

I think if you have a healthy way or perspective of looking at where we are now, it feels like we are that team that's gaining the experience, that's being able to fail at this level. Now we have an opportunity to respond. That's all you can ask for in a basketball season.

If you asked me in September or October, would I want a chance to be down 0-2 and having a chance to respond in Game 3 or be out of the Playoffs, I think I would choose the former. It's as simple as that in terms of putting it in perspective.

We're the only teams left. This is about chess. That's all it is.

Q. (Question from Utah Jazz guard Keyonte George.) It seems like you play the game free day in and day out. I want to know the different variables, whether the people you surround yourself with, does it come from your work, does it come from different routines that you do? Just want to kind of get your thoughts on how you are able to go in and play a free 48.

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, that's a great question. I think it starts with just being aware of your own goals, what you want to accomplish, your team goals, how you can help accomplish that. Also what's going to bring you peace of mind off the court when you leave it.

Some of us would say family, video games, other business entrepreneurial opportunities. Just helping you have a healthy balance with the game. The game is going to be a game. It's going to torment you emotionally. You're going to fail, succeed, make shots, miss shots. You want to be able to go home to a great family, people that love you unconditionally, those that are going to be truthful with you.

I'm grateful I've been able to build a tribe around me that has all those. Dealing with a lot of the criticism, when you're young, even when you're older, how to accomplish something like I'm trying to do right now, there's going to be a lot of people that want to see you fail. Get used to that too. There are going to be a lot of people that are going to be naysaying, want to see you kind of destroy yourself in the process.

I would say just focus on the people that really love you for you. Your teammates are there to support you, especially when you know them throughout. Then trusting the people that have been there before you. They'll give you a lot of advice to help you reason or rationalize what's going on.

That's a great question, brother. It took me awhile to figure that out and find that peace of mind. That's why you get a chance to see me up there.

I definitely want to see you accomplish that peace of mind a lot earlier than I had to. It's not worth it to let anybody's opinions get to the best of you. Or people that have never been in our position don't know what it takes, don't know the sacrifices, never will, but they guess, and they try to make it up. Show them respect, but at the same time understand that we're all human at the end of the day.

Q. A lot has been made about the bond that you and Luka have formed throughout the course of this season. Being down 0-2 and coming back to win, how are you helping him manage this situation? How are you helping each other?

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, it started with me just telling my hermano I got to play better for him, alongside him. In order for us to accomplish our goal, we both have to be playing well and we both have to be doing the little things, doing whatever it takes to win.

Easy conversation. But it started with me reaching out, just letting him know it's my fault, taking accountability for not playing particularly well. But also I got to continue to trust my guys around us or around me.

I need to have fun in the process. We've gotten this far because we've been a great team, not because we've just put it on me and Luka. It's been a total team, organizational effort to get this far. We just got to keep trusting in that.

Pretty simple conversation.

Q. I'm guessing there's a lot about the defense from the first two games you've probably liked, from time to time at least.

KYRIE IRVING: Rather win (smiling).

Q. The fact that the D has been good in stretches, how much does that help the confidence?

KYRIE IRVING: Man, we definitely have had some moments of positivity on the defensive end where we've gotten the missed shots. Again, I just remember one play that comes to mind, where potentially we could be down six. Pritchard hits a three going into the fourth quarter where it gives a little bit more breathing room to have the game in their hands.

Just being aware of some of the plays that they're going to try to make at the end of quarters, the plays they make at the start of the game to get them going a little bit, the plays they run when we're in the lead. We've had the lead in the first quarter -- 12-6, 13-6 both times. We're feeling good about ourselves, and they come out and run the same play four times in a row.

Our IQ has to be at a higher level. Also, our communication and trust has to be at an ultimate level where we can just trust our instincts out there.

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