

NBA Finals: Celtics vs. Mavericks

Friday, June 14, 2024

Dallas Mavericks

Kyrie Irving

Game 4: Postgame



Dallas Mavericks 122, Boston Celtics 84

Q. Kyrie, the sense of desperation that a team plays with down 3-0, are you able to replicate that in another game? How do you bring that mentality into the next game?

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, just by putting it into perspective what we're up against. History is going to be made either way. We'd like to be on the right side of it.

It just comes from the same sentiment, same phrase I was using the other day, just putting our best foot forward. We felt like Game 3 we had a good chance to close out that game to at least put it in a competitive spot.

We waited until Game 4 to ultimately play our best game. Took long enough for all of us to get to the party together and to play for each other the way we did tonight.

But it's definitely a possibility that we can replicate it. We understand we're going against the same great Boston team that is going to make it tough. We're going into their home den. We have another opportunity to extend the season. That's all we can ask for. We handled our business tonight. But the job is still an uphill battle, and we understand that.

Q. You shared a metaphor on Sunday to get the bazooka, the 50 cal. Do you think that job was executed tonight? How does that help the way y'all won tonight?

KYRIE IRVING: It was how we started off the game. Our ability to go home, get some rest, not having the same 48 hours to get our bodies ready and recover. So it felt like it was pretty much the regular season in terms of that aspect.

What I was referring to in that metaphor is go home, get all the armor, get all the ammo that you need and get ready for this because we're going to have to keep firing away to give ourselves a chance on the offensive end.

For us, we wanted to make it very much more respectable than it has been in the past few games in terms of limiting our mistakes on the defensive end. We've been one of the best teams in the league at getting stops. That's been our identity.

We play better I think offensively -- this is just my opinion; it can vary across the team -- I think we play better offensively when we're getting stops, able to push the pace, get easy opportunities in transition, which we weren't doing the past few games as often.

It felt good to be on the positive end of seeing our hard work reward us, especially on the defensive end.

Q. You're so familiar with what it's like to be in the eye of the storm, playing at the ultimate stage in the NBA. That said, how would you describe Luka's response tonight?

KYRIE IRVING: I think he made a few people eat their words. In a healthy way -- I'll say that in a healthy way. I don't want to curse up here or anything like that, get into any unnecessary beef, right, between us as players and the media.

I think this is his first opportunity and first taste of what it's like to be on this stage, and to not play up to your capabilities or be out there toward the end of the game where every mistake is magnified. I think that's probably what I'm really referring to, is when every mistake is magnified, there is going to be a response. That's your guys' job to give us your criticism. We go home and deal with it in a healthy way, hopefully.

I think with Luka, like I've been reiterating to the guys, stay off social media as best you can, man. Enjoy the moment we're in. It's not about making it this far. It's figuring out of the little nuances to get wins on this stage. That's what it's about for us as competitors and that's where our focus should be.

He responded very well. I expected it. I think a lot of people expected it that have seen Luka and known Luka. Just didn't know how it was going to happen. He made

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some things happen tonight that I was very proud of him. He grew.

That's what we've been talking about, too, since the beginning of the series, is our growth, us trending in the right direction, figuring out how we get wins together as a group with all those external factors still going on. How do you still lock in, how do you still focus in, breathe through some of those mistakes. I think he did a great job of that tonight.

Hopefully, we can still extend this series going into Game 5. But we still know we have to play our best and control what we can control.

Q. You talked the other day about how Boston really knows your game.

KYRIE IRVING: How many games was it that they had in a row? Was it 17?

Q. Yeah.

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah. Crazy.

Q. How have you been able to take that? When somebody knows what you do, how have you been able to evolve?

KYRIE IRVING: It's taken time, I tell you that. It's difficult because, as a competitor, you try not to display all your emotions out there to give an edge.

When you're going against some of the best of the best, they're going to use everything to their advantage. I think they've been able to do that. That's why I referred to just having my number or knowing my game very well.

I think I was able to take a step back, too, talk to my teammates a little bit more about just what that pressure can feel like. Not just from losing to a team, but just going against a team and knowing that they're doing everything possible to stop you. But it's a team game, so I have to really rely on my teammates.

I think we all did a great job of that tonight, continuing to support each other. It's not just me versus Celtics or Luka versus Celtics or anybody versus the media; it's us against the world, sort of to say, going against this good Celtics team.

You saw all those Celtics fans in there tonight. They travel in packs. When we go to Boston, there's going to be a bunch of them yelling a whole bunch of crazy stuff still, but I think we've been able to grow and face kind of this

adversity head on. We're figuring out each other in a crazy way during the highest stage of basketball. It's a beautiful thing, but it also can be chaotic if you don't know how to stay poised through it. I think we're figuring out each other throughout those phases.

Appreciate the question.

Q. Before the game tonight, Jason had an impassioned defense of the criticism to Luka.

KYRIE IRVING: Rightfully so, yeah.

Q. What does it mean when the coach goes out of his way to have his player's back unprompted like that?

KYRIE IRVING: I think it shows you how important it is to have quality leaders in the locker room and somebody that has been through it, somebody that can talk through it, and also somebody that's more than willing to sacrifice themselves to take the bullets and the brunt of the responsibility.

He knows how important it is for us to focus on the right things. We can't be focused on answering all these unfair, critical questions. Some of them may be fair, right? But if you're not necessarily out there playing with us, it's going to be hard for us to connect if you're talking s--- about one of our teammates.

We're not going to go for it. I think that's what you're seeing. Not just from us, but our head coach.

He's dealt with his fair share of criticism from some of you guys in this room, some guys in the past. Some of you criticize him as a coach, rightfully so, like I said.

I think if it goes over a certain boundary, you're going to see a real humans step up and protect their brother or sister. I think that's what you saw from J Kidd. I am proud of him.

I have the same sentiment. That's out little brother right there. He's in the Finals. He's going to make mistakes. That's also why I kind of had that kind of peaceful sentiment about me after the game. I'm not about to go up to Luka and say, It's all your fault. That's not how it works in our locker room. We dang sure don't want to start those bad habits now. I've been on teams where we have allowed the media or opinions to infiltrate what we have going on, and it has not worked out well.

I think if we put our best foot forward and focus on the things we can control, we got a good thing going here.

Q. Dereck Lively had two three-point attempts this season in his career. When he hoisted that shot up, what were you thinking? What can a shot like that do for his confidence?

KYRIE IRVING: I mean, if you're familiar with D Live's game, you know in high school he was shooting those threes. He was on a pretty good team that ended up winning a few championships together. D Live had an expanded game, sort of to say, when he was in high school. It's crazy. I was watching highlights not too long ago.

When he shoots it, I have the utmost confidence. I think it surprised a lot of people in the arena because of the attempts he hasn't had yet.

For him to step up and shoot that shot, we needed it. It eased everybody else out. Created a little bit more separation in the game. Eased everybody else's feelings that were out there with him.

When you have one of our vocal leaders making a three like that, you best believe he's going to come to the bench and let everybody know he made that shot. Everybody was happy for him. We knew it was a big shot.

More credit to him. Want him to keep working on it. But I don't know if he shoots it again. If he's open, and shoots it, then we have the confidence in him.

Q. You talk about poise a lot. That's something you've worked with Luka on in terms of not letting frustration affect his focus. He vowed to stay out of it with the refs today. He did that. When he's locked in on the game, not the refs, what impact does that have on him and the team?

KYRIE IRVING: Yeah, I think what we have to also account for is we're in a very physical game. When you're getting beat up like that out there every single play, you're going to have something to say to the refs.

In Luka's case, his relationship with the refs is not always the healthiest during games. The referees are humans, too. We have to respect what they do. They're a big part of this game, too. It could sway either way.

I think what you're seeing is him just taking accountability as best he can at this point in his life. He's a young person, still trying to figure it out. I give him that grace.

Also, we have to give him a little tough love where we let him know and reiterate you got to stay off those guys a little bit.

I think it's just lessons being learned. When he is locked in like that, not paying attention to the refs, he's a huge, impactful player for us, and a great leader for us. We want him to stay consistent on that and not be too hard on himself either. If he gets a tech, so be it. No one is batting an eye. If we're trying to get back into the game and we need the refs, there has to be a different perspective, different approach you got to take.

Sometimes a good conversation works with the refs. Sometimes eye-to-eye conversation works with them. When you're s--- talking them, MF'ing them all the time, it can get to them too. I'm not saying we're all perfect, but we have to use everything to our advantage on a positive note.

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