

There is a thread that runs through any [Celtics](#) conversation regarding Jared Sullinger. You can ask about his low-post offense or his rebounding or his grasp of the defense or his ability to step out and hit the midrange jumper, and somewhere in the first paragraph of the response there is certain to be one distinct phrase.

High basketball IQ.

Coach [Doc Rivers](#) is loath to give rookies meaningful minutes right out of the gate, but Sullinger got the start Saturday night in Washington and went for a very solid and complementary four points and seven rebounds in 30 minutes in the 89-86 win.

Kevin Garnett endorsed the move, saying, “He brings a different component, more importantly rebounding. He knows how to play without the ball. He’s a great passer. He blends well with our starting group.”

Sullinger has earned his time by not only doing what he is told but *understanding* it. And there are reasons for this. He’s got a good intellect on his shoulders, but it probably helped that his high school coach used to follow him home.

That would be Satch Sullinger, former mentor at Columbus Northland, one of the exemplary programs in the state of Ohio.

Father heard and read the praise for his son.

“It makes me feel like I was right on target with how I’ve been teaching the guys to play,” said Satch, who has sent a string of players on to collegiate success. “It makes me feel good, man. But it’s not about me; it’s about getting guys prepared to play a game that they love.”

As he speaks, he gathers steam.

“It all starts with character and purpose and getting your head right,” he said. “Like, ‘I’m not getting that rebound to lead the league in rebounding, I’m getting that rebound because the team needs that from me to win.’ Those are two totally different frames of mind, and when kids buy into that and get away from their goals and get into purpose, that’s the only time it opens up their mind to really understand the game.

“It’s, ‘How can I make this team better?’ At that point only will you ever get an IQ. You know, anybody that’s wrapped up in themselves is going to make a very small package.”

Step aside. Satch is on a roll, and he’s saying things every young basketball player should hear.

“Goals are self-serving,” he went on. “Purpose serves others. When we read history, we always read about people who served others, you know what I mean? And that’s all basketball is. The best thing you can do is support the skills that support yours. And the only way you can do that is to step out of yourself and become purposeful. I think that’s what those guys with the Celtics are seeing in Jared. You can’t see the game if you’re just wrapped up into your thing.

“I’m really proud that Jared has let me still be dad and lets me talk to him about between the ears. You know, the most important inches on the court are the 6 inches between your ears.”

The fear for many, if not all coaches, is they spend their time at practice getting through to players, and once they head out the gymnasium door there are other voices in their ears, not always with proper perspective or even the player’s best interest in mind.

That was never a real problem for Jared Sullinger.

“I’ve always taught my players that you play the game the way you live your life,” Satch said. “You handle your business. It’s called accountability. Like when you’re in math class, do math, because there’s a place for math in your life. It might not be carpentry or as a mathematician, but for example, if Jared gets double-teamed, one pass out of a double team automatically creates a 4-on-3 advantage for the Boston [Celtics](#).”

“So notice where the double team’s coming from so you know where to pass the ball. That’s math. That’s as simple as it can be.”

What Satch is talking about is the difference between Bill Russell and Wilt Chamberlain, the difference between a champion and a singular sensation.

“You can go after yours,” he said, “but what does that really mean? The worst team in America has a leading scorer and a leading rebounder. It ain’t about that; it’s about winning. In the NBA, are you really a superstar until you get a ring? Until you get a ring, you’re just a good player. You’re not a superstar.”

Right now, just days into his rookie season, Jared Sullinger is a good player. And very much Satch’s kid.