

41.21.1. Numbers of significance, numbers of a lifetime

41, his jersey number. 21, for the Seasons played. 1, for the one and only team he played for, ever since he got drafted from Germany to the NBA in 1998. These are the numbers of a sporting hero, that announced his retirement from his active career on Tuesday night at the American Airlines Center in Dallas. Dirk Nowitzki – a German boy from Bavaria, a US citizen and Texan son by choice. A living legend, a role model, a Maverick.

As the second ever German who played in the NBA announced his last home game in front of over 20.000 people, he got an instant response: The crowd at the American Airlines Center started to chant MVP! MVP! MVP! And wouldn't stop for minutes. Most valuable player – the title he earned back in 2007 as league MVP for the season played and again in 2011 as NBA Finals MVP for his appearance on the way to the NBA championship. The first ever won by the Dallas Mavericks.

The „German Wunderkind“ is looking back on an outstanding career. On Tuesday night the devoted Mav got referred to as „the greatest athlete in the history of Dallas.“ For the past two decades he played for this team in over 1.500 games. He scored over 31.000 points in total and hereby is together with Karl Malone and Kobe Bryant one out of only three players that managed to score more than 30.000 points for just one team throughout their careers. Apart from that he scored over 11.000 Rebounds, 3.000 Assists, 1.000 Blocks, 1.000 Steals and over 1.500 successful 3-Point shots. On top of that, he is the only 7-footer that ever won the All-star 3-point shooting contest. His one-legged fadeaway jumper is legendary by now anyway. All of that almost screams for a rank in the Hall of Fame of Basketball.

He once said during an interview, the players that inspired him most in his young years were Larry „The Legend“ Bird, Charles Barkley, Scottie Pippen, Detlef Schrempf and Sean Kemp. All five of them showed up on Tuesday night to pay their respect and they all found wonderful words to do so. Charles Barkley said „It's been an honor and a privilege to watch you“. He even remembered the moment they met for the very first time. By the end of their first match he had just one question: „Son, who the hell are you?“ Scottie Pippen said: „Man, you have been an inspiration to me! You played the game the right way, man!“ Larry Bird added: „The game is better because of you!“ He joked and referred to what he told Scottie a couple of years ago - „one more year.“ And he got the full support of thousands of fans that started screaming „one more year – one more year – one more year!“ Sean Kemp remembered that he could never get close enough to Dirk to block his famous fadeaway, no matter what he tried. He put it this way: „Not only that you bring a championship to Dallas, you are a champion!“

By the time Dirk Nowitzki got a hold of the mic, he struggled to cope with his emotions. He said that he tried his yoga-breathing but it wouldn't work. He thanked his fans for their constant support and one could clearly see how honored he felt by all that chanting and the words of his very own legends that smiled at him and gave him all those credits. On Tuesday night a truly great man ended his career in the nicest possible way. With the words of his coach Rick Carlisle, the owner of the Dallas Mavericks Mark Cuban, his fans, teammates and all those NBA-legends: Thank you Dirk for playing the game like you did all those years.