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Sixers superfan Tom Kline: Why the hiring of Doc Rivers is the right move at the right time

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In hiring [Doc Rivers](#) as head coach, the Sixers found the right man at the right time.

While I don't profess to have NBA front office acumen, I have been an up close observer of every NBA coach for the past 16 seasons from my seat next to the visiting team's bench at the Wells Fargo Center.

During the games and timeouts, I have seen Doc every one of those years in Philly. I've seen him lead the Boston Celtics and then the Los Angeles Clippers who he has brought here season after season to compete with our Sixers. Doc is a superb tactician in the huddle and is a disciplinarian without being an authoritarian. Uniformly and consistently when he talks, his players listen. I have seen every NBA coach at work in the huddle and on the sidelines. Doc is at the top of the pack.

Doc has a solid gold NBA resume. He played for 13 seasons and has coached for 20 years. He is a former All-Star point guard who was known for his tough defense. As a coach, Doc has achieved what Joel Embiid, Ben Simmons and the rest of the Sixers want — an NBA Championship like the one he won with the Celtics in 2008. He also took the Boston to the finals in 2010 and was named coach of the year in 2000, his first year as a coach with the Orlando Magic.



TOM KLINE

Tom Kline chats with Doc Rivers on the court at a Sixers game.

Doc's coaching record of 943 wins and 681 losses includes 176 more wins than the Sixers had during the same period. Doc spent nine years in Boston, so he knows how to coach in our kind of town with passionate fans and a demanding media. And he's done the same on the national stage. In short, Doc is a proven winner. There will be no on the job training. That counts for a lot.

Doc also knows how to coach superstars. In Boston, he coached the Big Three of Kevin Garnett, Ray Allen, and Paul Pierce — all first round, top 10 draft picks — taking them to two NBA Finals and where effort, defense, and making big shots in the clutch were hallmarks. Doc led the Big Three to an NBA title over a team led by an all-time great known by one name, Kobe. For the Sixers to achieve their goal of winning an NBA title, Doc will need to lead them past teams led by greats like LeBron James and Giannis Antetokounmpo.

This year with Kawhi Leonard and Paul George playing together for the first time, Doc led the Clippers to within one win of the Western Conference finals. Granted, the team had higher expectations and blew a 3-1 lead, but, hey, they are the Clippers. More important, Doc had the fifth-best regular season coaching record in the NBA since taking over the Clippers in 2013.

Like the Clippers, the Sixers have two superstars in Embiid and Simmons. The key will be getting both of them to achieve their full potential, while surrounding them with a strong supporting cast and especially a shooting guard. Doc rightly put any trade talk of his two stars to bed when he said: "They've won 65% of the games they've played in. So, it clearly works when they play together."

Getting Embiid and Simmons, along with Tobias Harris, to jell together is the coach's job. Doc got a lot out of Tobias and will predictably get as much or more in the upcoming season. Setting a high bar and high expectations is the coach's job. Ensuring the players are well conditioned and develop all aspects of their game, including a jump shot for Simmons, is also the coach's job. It is a job that Doc is well qualified to do.

Off the court, Doc is also the right coach for the times. In the midst of a tumultuous summer, Rivers, the son of a police officer, captivated the nation with his blunt and poignant words: "All you hear [is] Donald Trump and all of them talking about fear. We are the ones getting killed. We are the ones getting shot. We are the ones denied [the right] to live in certain communities. We have been hung. We have been

shot. And all you do is keep hearing about fear. It's amazing to me why we keep loving this country and this country does not love us back. It's really so sad. I should just be a coach. I am so often reminded of my color and it's just really sad. We have got to do better. But we have to demand better."

Speaking out, standing up for others and doing what is right is a sign of true leadership. Doc did it before – with dignity and grace – when he stood up to racist comments made by former Clippers owner Donald Sterling, who was forced to sell the team.

I will miss Doc as a visiting coach. He was always good for a laugh and even a hug before each game — even for a Sixers fan like me who would then predictably root against him and his team once the National Anthem ended. I'll be happy to look down the court and see our team's fortunes and fate in Doc's capable hands.

Doc Rivers is a winner on and off the court. Credit the Sixers owners for moving with lightning speed to hire him five days after he parted ways with the Clippers. He was the best coach available. And, yes, the Clippers' loss is the Sixers gain.

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