

The Star-Ledger

NBA

Rivers: Jefferson changes things

NETS NOTEBOOK

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BOSTON — Richard Jefferson is back at work, officially, and if Doc Rivers' hunch is right, the Nets will become very dangerous when they open the postseason Sunday against Miami.

Assuming, of course, that Jefferson looks anything like the player who was on an All-Star pace through 33 games.

"You shouldn't have to ask me that — that's a hell of a team," the Celtics coach said of the Nets last night. "I mean it would be great for them. I said when they weren't well, you have two stars on the team, you should be a good basketball team. You add a third guy, that makes them a very good basketball team. They would have one of the better starting fives in the league, in my opinion."

Good enough to match up with a top seed, such as Miami?

"Yeah, absolutely," Rivers replied. "Who's to say if they didn't have that all year they wouldn't be (No. 1 themselves)? We don't know that."

■ **Jefferson**, as expected, received clearance from surgeon Charles Melone to resume practice yesterday — three weeks ahead of schedule — but he didn't join the team here for the season finale.

Lawrence Frank didn't give him the option: The coach told the forward to stay home and do some more rehab work on his surgically repaired left wrist.

"The doctor was very positive," team president Rod Thorn said. "To use his word, remarkable, how fast he healed. His strength, his range of motion was terrific."

Jefferson's therapist, Gary Flink of Excel Orthopedic Rehabilitation in Fort Lee, called his recovery "faster than any other pro athlete I've treated. From Day 1, he's just wanted to get back on the basketball court. He's let me do everything I

needed to do, and he hasn't missed a day — five days a week, two hours a day — which tells you what an intense competitor he is. He's ready to go."

How ready? Nobody really knew.

"First we have to make the playoffs," Frank said before the game. "In the event we do make it, we'll see how he does in practice, but I think you have to be realistic. He hasn't done anything in four months. He hasn't had contact and he hasn't had any practice. We're not going to put any pressure on him."

■ **Clifford Robinson** seems far more fluid lately, with good reason: "The chiropractor is doing good work," the veteran forward said. And if the Nets survived last night, he was making plans to return to go back for at least a few more treatments.

"(Tuesday) night was the first time in a long time I was able to make quick moves without feeling a sharp pain," Robinson added. "I felt really good for once."

