

State Farm Champions Classic: Kentucky vs. Duke

Tuesday, November 9, 2021

Kentucky Wildcats

John Calipari

Jacob Toppin

Oscar Tschiebwe

Press Conference



Duke - 79, Kentucky - 71

Q. (No microphone.)

JACOB TOPPIN: I think we fought, to be honest. We definitely fought. We were in the game. 37.7 percent from the field goal. That's not good and we still were in the game. So like we just got to make shots. I feel like we had good opportunities to make shots, but they didn't fall.

So we definitely fought as a group. I'm proud of this team and what we did today. We fought, but we didn't come out with the W so we have things to work on.

Q. (No microphone.)

OSCAR TSCHIEBWE: That's what you got to do. If you really want to help your team, you got to fight, so I came out and fight. So I was going for everything. I was doing my best. I came in to win the game. That's why I was fighting. I cannot make anybody rebound them for me. That's why I was going for everything.

JOHN CALIPARI: He had three jumpers he didn't take that I was like telling him, Shoot the ball. He's a really good shooter. But we got to still figure out how we get the ball to him closer to the basket. But he also can really shoot.

Q. (No microphone.)

OSCAR TSCHIEBWE: It is something we work on with the coaches and everybody because if you watch me these past two years I've really struggled with that. If you see the way we're guarding it helps with not getting in foul trouble, but not good for rebounds, but something, again, we work on it because I used to go push people behind, but right now we work with the coach, I got to go side to side. When you go side to side you're not going to get called for that. So I just go physical. I just feel you got to be using your

head on every play.

Q. Duke went on a 22-5 run and you guys came right back and countered it. What do you call to do that and what do you think that says about the team?

JACOB TOPPIN: I mean, it says a lot. We're never going to back down from a fight. We're always going to play to the end. When it says 0:00 on the clock, that's when we'll stop fighting.

So no matter if we're down, if they go on a run -- basketball is a game of runs, so everyone's going to have their runs now. If they had their run now, we got to go for our run. So we're never going to back down from a fight. We're going to always fight because that's who we are. That's what we work on. We work on fight and if you're not going to fight, you can't play this game. So that's what we preach on.

Q. What do you think was the difference in this game, particularly in that big run Duke had in the second half?

JACOB TOPPIN: Defensively we got to be better, individually and as a team. That's really pretty much it.

On the offensive end we got to execute better. We got to start making shots. Again, we shot 37 percent from the field goal for the game and that's not good enough and we were still in the game, so that says a lot about this team.

Q. Talk about the challenge of Banchemo tonight.

JACOB TOPPIN: He's a very skilled player. Like, let's not hide the fact that's a good player. He's 6'-10", 250 or whatever he is. It was a challenge, but I like challenges. I take pride in my defense. There was times where I stopped playing and he got easy buckets and that's on me.

But at the end of the day, we learned from it. We're going to go back, watch film, and I'm going to watch film, and we're going to see what we can do better as a team and as individuals and we're just going to move on.

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Q. What was it like looking out and seeing your brother and the Knicks coach and Knicks players, former Kentucky guys supporting you guys?

JACOB TOPPIN: It was just a surreal moment. Being from New York it's a dream come true. Playing MSG where my brother plays all the time, it's a surreal moment. I don't know how to describe it.

Q. What can you and your teammates take from watching Oscar basically play himself to exhaustion trying to grab every rebound?

JACOB TOPPIN: I would say we're used to it. We watch it every day in practice. He's always fighting. He doesn't take days off. He wants to better himself. And the way he plays in practice helps us as individuals and a team.

So he's always been a fighter, he's always been a hustle player, and he's always been that type of dog to just go after rebounds, dive on the floor. He's been that type of player. So it's good for us and it's good for the team.

Q. What did you make of what you saw tonight?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, we got it to four, and then we'll watch the tape. Two shots blocked, and all I said all week, If you drive, just don't get it blocked. Don't even worry about making it because when that guy comes, the backboard's free. We got two shots blocked. And part of this is, it was me, based on playing Sahvir too many minutes and I think he tired out a little bit. He had five turns in the second half.

But TyTy wasn't playing well, and so I just stuck with who was playing well. So he got tired. TyTy played the way he did because we kind of wanted him to. Like, this kid is, we're playing exhibition games, he's shooting nine and ten shots. You're supposed to be a guy that can go get baskets.

So I will take responsibility for some of the plays that he made. And I just said to him, You know, kid, you don't have to make every shot. You just can't miss 'em all. You got to make one or two. And he just was missing a bunch of shots, and if you watched him play, that's not him.

But this was a moment kind of game and for us to be in that game when our better players did not play well and their two really good players played really well and we had a chance to win. That's crazy. So shooting 37 percent, we're still working on post play for Oscar, but I'm telling you guys, he can really shoot the basketball. And so when he passed up those foul line shots, I'm like, he passed up three of them, like shoot it.

I thought Kellan played well. I thought Davion played well. The game was a funky game for Daimion, but I think he'll be fine.

Q. I know that the turnovers were high in the second half. What was it like having somebody like Sahvir run your team --

JOHN CALIPARI: Oh, and he's in huddles talking. I mean, he's directing. He's taking, he's doing -- look, when you have a downhill runner, he's just got to get comfortable with our guys, and Oscar has never been, they have never thrown lobs to Oscar. Everything was a bounce and a mush, you know, and now all of a sudden, we're trying to get him -- you notice, he laid 'em in versus dunking it.

So we got a lot of work to do. But you have to have a post presence if you're going to win. That's where you shoot a higher percentage. We missed a bunch of shots that I'm, like, wow.

But give Duke credit. I mean, they kept us in pick and rolls, and again, I should have gone to forcing down the sideline earlier than I did. Not our kids' fault. I told them after, that's on me. But I loved our fight. I loved our competitive spirit. And that's what our program is always been about.

Now, some guys got to step up. Like, when you talk about, I'll just throw a few years ago, Tyler Herro, no one, he was a four star. He played in the McDonald's game. Some of you, oh, we knew it. What are you talking about?

Keldon Johnson. We knew this. But all of a sudden what did they do? Whoop. And then all of a sudden we get a chance to win a national title. They weren't there early. This team has some guys, I don't know which guys will do it, but they got to step up. I said, they got, their two top-five players played like top-five players. Now if you want to be them, then step your game up. I think we'll be able to do some of that, but it all starts with fight. I've got to do a better job in scheming defensively and what we're going to do, but I'm, like I said, I walk away, I wanted us to compete against ourselves and do stuff -- we only had 13 turnovers. Like you think we had like 40 turnovers, we had 13. But we had 15 assists. And one kid had seven. Think about what that means. And he had a bunch of them late in the second half.

Q. Keion played 16:40, that's a lot of minutes fewer than any other starter, he didn't have foul trouble --

JOHN CALIPARI: He was struggling to guard Paolo.

Q. It was purely a matchup deal?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, did you watch the game?

Q. I had to write on the first game in the first half.

JOHN CALIPARI: There you go. So tell him what happened.

Q. You coached a lot of really good freshmen, Paolo --

JOHN CALIPARI: Really good. Really good. He's really good. Great kid, great family. Really good. You almost, you can't -- we had too much respect for him. We backed away and now he shoots. No. Make him make basketball plays. I kept saying it, but we're afraid, so they kept backing up. Now Jacob seemed to go guard him and make him spin and do some stuff. But I even said prior to the game, they're going to iso him. I thought they would short pick and a step-up screen and short roll him to the foul line and let him play there. Well they played him on an elbow and they played him in a short corner. It was the same idea. And then we were like, Okay, how are we going to do this. And it was a tough matchup. Keion didn't play that bad it was a tough matchup. We wanted to try to win the game.

Q. You recruited Trevor and Paolo pretty hard --

JOHN CALIPARI: Trevor not as hard, but.

Q. Was it hard --

JOHN CALIPARI: Recruited Roach. Recruited Griffin. Probably recruited Williams. We got beat on all of them.

Q. But seeing those guys that you recruited so hard thriving.

JOHN CALIPARI: Paolo's the one that we recruited so hard. I'm fine with it. I don't take this stuff personal. I hope he does well and I hope we play him again and he doesn't play so well. But his dad is Italian and he's an Italian citizen. So am I. I got a passport. And I still didn't get him. I don't know. So, but you know, I mean, he's good. The thing that they have done right now is he's in better shape. And they took him out for a long period of time, I don't know why they had him out a stretch.

Q. Cramps.

JOHN CALIPARI: What was it?

Q. Cramps.

JOHN CALIPARI: So he's not in shape.

(Smiling.)

Q. With this potentially being your final year against Coach Krzyzewski --

JOHN CALIPARI: No, no, we're hoping one more. But go ahead.

Q. In that case what will you remember about your battles with him?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I remember one where we got beat so bad that I told the guys in the last five minutes, If anybody fouls or stops this clock, you're finding your own way home, I want to be out of this building in seven minutes.

And then the other time Tyler Ulis just totally dominated the game and we beat them. We may have beat them a couple times, I don't know, you would have to tell me. I know we beat them with Tyler Ulis. So may have beaten them another time too.

But you know that you're going to have a well-coached team, his players are going to want to win the game, so are mine. That's why you have this kind of game. He said to me after, This is like a post-season game. So but we, the coaches, I don't know if they, if you -- we got him a, we got -- the three coaches together, because none of us are going to be able to do anything here, so we did a Zoom call. And Bill Self said, Cal, why don't you get us a bottle of Pappy for him and we'll all chip in, which they didn't chip in, just so you know. So we got him a bottle of Pappy -- you guys know what that Pappy Van Winkle? We got people that don't know in this room. Well look it up. Okay. I sent, when we gave it to him it was, If you don't drink bourbon -- and I knew he didn't -- but if you don't drink bourbon, you save this and when I retire you give it back to me. He came up to me prior to the game and said, My daughter saw this and said, You can't get this. And I knew he didn't know. He was like, Hey, nice bottle, pour it out, you know. And I would have done the same, but now I live in Kentucky, so I know what bourbon is. And I need some bourbon right now, to be honest with you.

But I think it was an enjoyable game that we learned, hopefully they learned. We got to have some guys step up. I got to -- I can't play Sahvir how many minutes did I play him?

Q. 38.

JOHN CALIPARI: Can't play a guy 38 this early in the season. So he should have played about 32 and he would

have been fine, he wouldn't have had those turnovers. Not his fault, that's on me.

TyTy, he took more shots in this game than the two exhibition games. And part of that was me saying, Look, I want you to go at these dudes. So...

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