

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 11, 2022

## Kentucky Wildcats

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

## John Calipari

## TyTy Washington Jr.

## Sahvir Wheeler

### Postgame Press Conference

Kentucky 77, Vanderbilt 71

JOHN CALIPARI: Hats off to Vandy. Third game in three nights, and they never stopped. They played until the horn, and that's amazing. We thought we could get into their legs at some point in the second half, and it didn't happen. You know, Wright making those deep threes and gave them a chance, but we fought.

I thought Jacob and Davion played unbelievably well. It looks like Jacob may have a broken nose. I don't know, but he played with it, and that showed us a lot. These two, the way they're playing and TyTy finished the game, playing well, and Sahvir made big baskets. He made that jump shot, made that floater.

A good win. I mean, we're -- we broke down a little bit, but when you talk 21 assists, 12 turnovers, it's good numbers. The one thing plus ten rebounds, but the one thing I'm going to tell you, I kept saying why aren't we up more? We're shooting 50%. They're shooting 38. Why are we not up more? Well, they got some offensive rebounds, and that -- they made 11 threes. That's how they were able to stay in the game, and they made them, 11 threes. You would think they were tired. They weren't that tired.

**Q. TyTy, you finished, obviously, with a lot of points in the final six minutes or so, and I thought I saw coach Cal sort of urge you to be more assertive. I don't know if that happened or not, but what ) got you going? What do you think -- how do you account for that?**

TYTY WASHINGTON, JR.: At the start of the second half I wasn't playing through bumps, and he pulled me out, and he got on me, and I got really upset, and it was just like everybody else on the team was just telling me, like, you're



okay. Don't let him get to your head. Be you. He wants what's best for you. Everybody on the team knows what I can do and what I can bring for this team. When I have my teammates pushing me, giving me confidence, and then that's going to be the result (Then that's, no and).

**Q. This is for TyTy. Sahvir, you can chime in on this also, but, TyTy, you've heard all year about Kentucky fans showing up for the SEC tournaments. Sahvir may have told you about that. What did you think?**

TYTY WASHINGTON, JR.: It was crazy. When we first got out there, everybody was just screaming. I looked in the crowd seeing nothing but blue shirts. Whenever I hear that go big blue chant, it's just so unreal.

THE MODERATOR: Do you want Sahvir on that one as well?

SAHVIR WHEELER: I think I mentioned that earlier in the week, I remember my freshman year I was at Georgia playing against Ole Miss, and I looked up in the stands expecting red, but no, I saw a lot of Kentucky shirts out there. Tonight like TyTy said, I think my favorite part is when we make that run, and we kind of hear that go big blue. That gives me goose bumps right now just having the support of our fans traveling with us, and they make a difference for sure.

**Q. How important was it for tonight to happen for TyTy? You've obviously gotten going a little faster since you came back from injury. Just for him to start hitting those shots and not just shots, but big clutch shots for you guys again?**

SAHVIR WHEELER: It's just him getting back in a rhythm and also going back to the fact that the depth of our team, and it can be anyone's night. At any given time, someone can step up. Someone can make plays, and that's the credit to the coaching staff. Again, that's the buy-in to sharing the ball, when we are playing for each other, and when a guy is hot, finding him and instilling confidence in him while we're in the game play.

**Q. This one is for both Sahvir and TyTy. How**



**important was the effort that Jacob gave you guys tonight? He was shooting the ball well and played really well defensively.**

THE MODERATOR: Sahvir.

SAHVIR WHEELER: Oh, his energy, his energy, his presence. He was talking. Even with the face mask, you can barely understand him, but you know he was saying something, and that is big-time right there, and for him to have the ball and still kind of make those shots, the same thing Coach got on him early in the first half and was, like, why shoot an air ball three when you can step in and make midrange, 75%, 80% of the time. He adjusted to that, took constructive criticism, took that with him on the offensive end. And defensively, he was the anchor in the second half. Being able to switch and being able to talk out the actions and contest and blocking shots, coming from the weak side and finishing possessions for us on the defensive end as well.

THE MODERATOR: Same for TyTy.

TYTY WASHINGTON, JR.: Pretty much the same as what Sahv just said, just handle stuff. After he shot that three -- Coach Cal always tells us to shoot the ball straight. So when he shot it to the right, I said that wasn't straight, right? Then he got his face mask, like he started shooting the ball straight making a whole bunch of baskets.

What he did for us on defense was phenomenal. He brings that for us every game. He is always rebounding. He is just an energy guy for us. For him to make those big baskets and big moments when we needed them, that was pretty good.

**Q. For both of you guys. Can you talk about the defense on Pippen? He had the two big games in the regular season. What do you think made the difference tonight?**

SAHVIR WHEELER: I think now at this part of the year, it's all about a sense of urgency. And Coach Cal was saying at the beginning of the game, at this time of the year, it's about defense. That's how you win games.

Also, we obviously all saw the game last night when he shot 21 free-throws, and we were making an emphasis to keep him off the line. Play with your hands up. Keep length on him. Keep different guys on him so we can wear him out. That's essentially what ended up happening. You know, making him run around the court and trying to play one-on-one against guys who I feel like are confident on my team can defend one-on-one, and that's how we got the edge at the end of the game.

**Q. TyTy, since Cal got here, we've watched a lot of freshmen. It takes the entire season for them to get from point A to point B and be ready. You have had so many injuries in between. How have you fought through and got to where you are now despite all that?**

TYTY WASHINGTON, JR.: Just pretty much battling adversity. I'm playing with an older group of guys, so I know they all believe in me. The coaching staff believes in me. Just playing with guys that are older than me, we're a pretty smart team, so it's just like we have depth. When I'm hurt, I'm not going to just sit there and try to make it about me. I know my teammates have my back.

When I was hurt, Davion, Kellan, they both stepped up tremendously, so it's just like I'm not going to make it about me. I'm just going to get treatment, get back in the gym and stuff like that, just try to get back to 100%, but I know my teammates got my back.

**Q. Question for Sahvir. Was this a good way to start the postseason with the tough, physical game where you guys had to make plays?**

SAHVIR WHEELER: Definitely. That's crazy you guys are asking questions as if you were in the pregame meetings with us. Coach was saying how this is going to be the hardest game, the first game in the SEC and in the NCAA tournament. It's going to be the hardest game.

We kind of wanted this. We welcomed it. We always welcome a challenge to figure out how we can win at the end of the game when it gets tough because it's not always going to be 20-point wins or we're down and coming back. It's going to be sometimes back and forth, and we have to battle and figure out what we do best at the end of the game in order to finish and close out games.

**Q. Coach Cal, how significant was it just to, as you start this run, to finally have TyTy kind of back being TyTy? It's been a little while for him.**

JOHN CALIPARI: It was -- you know, I know how good he is, and trying to get him, my concern always is guys that are young don't know how to play through bumps, and they get bumped, and now they're off balance, and then they turn it over and all that, and that's what I got on him about a couple of times in the game. If you're not going to be physical driving, then don't drive. Pass the ball.

His ability to make shots and make free-throws and make floaters, he is skilled. The defense that he can play because he has got some physical toughness and size makes him where he is on both sides of the ball, but it was

good. I thought Daimion -- or Davion and Jacob were the two that were the difference-makers, just their energy.

I mean, it's hard to explain to guys all the time that it's your passion, your energy, your fight, and, well, what about my skill, and I can shoot and all -- well, you know, this thing that they want to do, in most cases, it's going to be the team that wants it the most, that plays with the most energy, that plays with the spirit about them.

How about some of the blocks that Jacob had? It was ridiculous. So it's a good first one.

I'll be honest with you, Vandy has played so well down the stretch, what they did against a good Alabama team. I knew what this would be. I knew it would be hard.

**Q. Just kind of stepping away from the game, I'm not sure if you saw the news, but Cuonzo Martin is now out at Missouri. Just kind of wanted to get your reaction to that and kind of what your thoughts are.**

JOHN CALIPARI: He is a terrific coach. He is a terrific person, and he will get another job. The issue that's going around right now is the transfer portal. Tom Crean lost four really good players. Now all of a sudden, he is out.

I said this would happen if we didn't do this right. So you're going to have coaches lose jobs because they're going to lose players. If I were still at U Mass, I wouldn't recruit freshmen because I would have them for one year and someone would take them. I just wouldn't do it.

In our league, you're going to have guys that are going to bounce around. I'm not saying they shouldn't have freedom to do stuff, but I think there's got to be some parameters, and it's not just, you know -- I also think if -- how we do this and how we protect coaches in this too because we're trying to help the kids, and all of a sudden, we're in a microwave society right now. We need it now, now. I'm putting 30 seconds on it, and my sandwich is hot.

What happens, the kids -- I got a couple of freshmen that are going to be terrific players, but I'm not -- I can't play them as much because the guys in front of them are better, but a year from now, they're going to be ridiculously good, but we're all facing this.

Now, what's happened with our transfers, and I talked about it, because of the kids that have come with us and have transferred in and have done so well, you know we're going to get calls. Kids are going to want to transfer to Kentucky. I told everybody, you know, you're helping Kentucky by having it this way. I figured that would end it. The minute I said that, they would say, well, then we're not

doing it. They went with it. So I just --

Look, I have great respect for Cuonzo Martin. I have great respect for Tom Crean. I can remember them beating us in Indiana, and it became an Espy, and then we played them in the NCAA tournament and beat their brains in pretty good that same year. I have to -- let me make sure I throw that in there.

You know, they're coaches that can really coach, and as an A.D., you have to look at situations and say, why did this happen? Is he the kind of person, the kind of coach we want? I think that it's a totally different way of thinking about even hiring coaches that were "fired."

**Q. It seemed louder tonight than maybe in Rupp for some games. I wonder what you thought of the crowd support and what factor you think that was.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Let me say our fans in Rupp, we had a 50 some game winning streak, a 40 some game winning streak, and Rupp Arena is a terrific building with great fans, so you can't really take away. I mean, we're winning 95% of our games in that building, but these are the fans in most cases that cannot get into Rupp, so they go to the tournament.

They also know I don't make a big deal out of this tournament, but they're fine. Just make sure we can stay a few days, and I looked out there, and I know somebody said, well, there's a team that is going to have all the fans. Did you guys hear that? Like they got -- they sold -- they're going to be the leading ticket. Are you out of your mind? Are you smoking crack? (Laughing.)

I guess you just say it enough, and it's true. I'll just say it again and say it again and say it again, and it's true. Our fans travel. If we played in Montana, they would be there. I don't know how they get there. I don't know if there's a wagon train. I don't have any idea, but they're there, and they're loud.

We were getting on the bus today where police had to get them away from the tunnel where we're staying because they were trying to run down next to the bus, but it makes this place what it is, our fans.

I say it all the time, they're crazy, but I love them. I love our fans, and we have some that aren't the true fans that will -- but that's everybody. Our fans, one thing I say -- why I say they're crazy? I will watch this tape tonight. I just watched it because I coached it. Then I'll watch the tape one time. We have fans that watch it three times. I'm, like, what's wrong with you people? I watch it once, and I coach the team. You're watching it three times. Yeah, I just wanted

to make sure. What? But that's what makes our fans unique and different.

**Q. The rubber match coming tomorrow with Tennessee, you guys beat their brains out when you had that Rupp Arena crowd.**

JOHN CALIPARI: They then beat our brains out.

**Q. Yes, they did. You are going to have the crowd on your side again. It's not just the crowd, but where does the energy come from when you're not in your home environment to win a game like this tomorrow?**

JOHN CALIPARI: You know, first of all, you guys know the respect I have for Rick Barnes. He is a friend, dear friend. I hate to play against friends, but we're both going to have our teams as ready as we can with a quick turn. I mean, we're playing tomorrow at 3:00. Our kids are going to get to bed by midnight. We play tomorrow at 3:00, so it will be interesting.

We weren't ready up there. I mean, Oscar and -- we weren't ready. Their guard play was so good there. It was like -- and ours was not the same, and I got out-coached. I knew they would play different, which they move the ball. The ball pops. They're running great offense, and they're physical, and they're a good defensive team. They're good. It will be a hard game for us to win. No question.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports