

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 12, 2022

Kentucky Wildcats

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

John Calipari

Keion Brooks, Jr.

Oscar Tshiebwe

Postgame Press Conference



Kentucky 62-Tennessee 69.

JOHN CALIPARI: Congratulations to Tennessee. They did a great job. They fought. We had our chances. We didn't shoot the ball particularly well today. Some of that was us. Some of that was Tennessee, but we had our chances, and it shows what they -- they didn't let go of the rope. It shows what their coach is about, shows what their team is about.

Now we get to get on a plane and go home and get ready for this next tournament. But this thing here, when I said we should have nine teams, look at it. Maybe I was right, again. Wait a minute. What about Florida? Texas A&M is killing everybody. Florida should have won that game. What does that mean about them?

I mean, this league -- Mississippi State, two at half. They have a chance. Then all of a sudden, James makes four threes. That ball game is a two-bucket game. This league has done some good stuff, and now let's see what happens in the postseason. I'm hoping seven, maybe eight teams get in. And if that's the case, the way you judge a league is what's their record in the NCAA tournament?

If half your teams are three-quarters losing the first game, it kind of tells you that maybe you weren't what everybody said. I have a lot of confidence in these teams.

Q. Keion, just what's the mood of the team right now after not your best performance, but going into next week, the tournament that really counts?

KEION BROOKS, JR.: We're still in great spirits. Looking forward to what we got coming up next week. We were really, really happy with the way we continued to fight. We

could have gave up, and we still pushed it, and still had a chance to win the game, so it's a tough loss. We hate to lose, but we're still in good spirits moving forward.

Q. Oscar, Keion, either one, both of you, what are you most concerned about getting right before next week's tournament?

THE MODERATOR: Oscar.

OSCAR TSHIEBWE: I think we just have to stay focused and locked in, be ready for the next tournament. I'm pretty confident with my teammates, with everything. This was kind of an off day for us. We didn't really make a shot. We still have our confidence, and we're going to be ready next week.

THE MODERATOR: Same for Keion.

KEION BROOKS, JR.: To piggyback on what O just said, we've seen it all. We've played without certain players, had to switch different line-ups and stuff all year, so now we're just -- we got everybody back healthy. We lost today. That sucks, but moving forward, we just want to continue to hammer down on being disciplined, being focused, because our coaches are going to put us in the right place to be successful. It's us out there. We just have to make sure we execute.

Q. For both of you, again, was it more about what you didn't do or more about what Tennessee did to disrupt what you were trying to do?

THE MODERATOR: Keion, would you go first?

KEION BROOKS, JR.: You have to give them credit. They played a really good game, shot the ball well, exceptionally to start the game. Then we made some errors that when we went on a run, we would miss a rebound or turn the ball over or get back-cut that kind of halted our momentum when we were really, really, you know, turning up and getting back in the game. So it's a little bit of both. They played well, but we also did shoot ourselves in the foot a couple of times.

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THE MODERATOR: And Oscar.

OSCAR TSHIEBWE: Like Keion just say, they really played good. We were just trying to do the things that Coach wanted us to do, but I think today was just kind of an off day for us, and we were missing shots. We give them credit for defense. They did play good. They were hustling in every position. I think we're good and still confident with my teammates in everything we're doing.

Q. Oscar, you've done such a good job of avoiding foul trouble the past few games. What was the difference today? What did you learn and the way that Tennessee was playing you?

OSCAR TSHIEBWE: I just have to be smart. There's some players, they come in trying to get you in foul trouble, but today I was just hustling, do my job. I don't know. I just have to be smart. Tennessee, they play smart. That's why they got me a little bit. I have to be smart in the upcoming game.

Q. On the offensive end, did you feel like you were getting good looks, and they just weren't falling, or you didn't do enough to create or what did you see there?

KEION BROOKS, JR.: I feel like the looks that we got were good. It was just one of those days where the ball didn't go in for us. There were some situations where we didn't help each other out with getting open to get some of those shots, and sometimes we weren't shot-ready when the ball was kicked out so us.

I think for the most part, we got a lot of good looks. And Kellan had some shots that rimmed in and out. Jacob and his pull-ups and 15-footers, shots that he never missed, went in and out. A lot of shots like that that didn't go our way tonight, but sometimes that happens, but you just have to continue to fight through it, and we still had a chance to win even with all that.

THE MODERATOR: Oscar, same.

OSCAR TSHIEBWE: Exactly what he just said. We had a couple of players that did not want to shoot when they were open. Like Jacob, he always makes those 15, 17 footers, but the coaches say you have to shoot them. I'm down there fighting for rebounds. He miss. I probably have 50/50 chance to get the rebound. They just have to shoot the ball when they're open. You have do the things that is going to help us. We're going to go back and work on that stuff and be ready to turn it up next week.

Q. Is this the type of day you can just flush and move on, or do you have concerns heading into March?

JOHN CALIPARI: Who did I get the last shot for that I thought could close the gap? I'm surprised somebody didn't ask me, why would you do that? Because I really believe in him. Even when he is playing that way, I believe in him.

I told him, why do you think I did that? Because you believe in me. Sometimes more than you're believing in yourself. You miss two, and you think I'm going to miss ten. Davion does the same thing. I was all over Davion, just shoot the ball. Jacob, just shoot it. They were 1 for 16 amongst them. We were 2 for 20. Folks, we could have won this game.

Think about what I'm saying. You can say, well, they didn't -- well, we may have been 2 for 25 or those guys may have been 1 for 19 if they shot more, but I still want them to shoot more, and Oscar is right. If you shoot it and you miss it, we have a beast standing under the basket. Just shoot it. If you are anywhere near my bench, if someone on my team ever says, well, he takes me out every time I miss a shot, look, you're a liar. I'm right there. You lied. You need to ask for forgiveness.

He tells you to shoot it, and you don't shoot it. Don't say he takes you out for misses. We didn't -- I like the fact we had a chance to win. I thought we were going to win. I went crazy because you got beat on a back door to lose the game? That means you stopped playing. You just stood up and stopped. Back door. And it's like, wait a minute, do you really want to see somebody go, my fault? Like it's my fault. What? The world knows it's your fault. You don't have to confirm it. They watched it.

We had some of those plays that I was laughing. I'm, like, if we win this game, thank goodness it was under two minutes on that last out of bounds. Thank goodness. Because he had to go look. Everybody watched it and said why did you do that? That made it fun.

Q. Cal, how much, if any, do you think sort of all the disruption to the line-up over the last four weeks, disrupted where you were offensively and how do you think you dial back in?

JOHN CALIPARI: I think we're in really good shape. We got three guys at every position, so what I told them -- I was going to tell them -- and I did tell them before this tournament, you don't have to play great because I'll just play somebody else. I don't even have to get mad. If you're not ready to go, I'm just going to play somebody else. Just be ready next game.

Then I was going to say, the only way that doesn't work if

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eight of you play like crap. Then it doesn't matter if we have a lot of guys. If you have a bunch of guys that didn't play well, you're not winning. We were 2 for 20. I think a couple of them were air balls from good shooters, like the best shooter in the conference.

So, look, I'll watch the tape because it's just what I do, but this we knew would be a physical bump-and-grind game, and I thought we held our own, but there were -- when we had it to six, there were three plays back to back to back. You can't win national championships on plays like that. You cannot because a good team will make you pay just like Tennessee made us pay. You can't, and they were our mistakes. A back door, we were running a play. The guy went the wrong way. That like a quarterback goes to hand it off to the running back that went that way in a national championship game. They clobbered the quarterback. He fumbles, and they run, and you just lost the national title because you went the wrong way? We did one of those. It's a good lesson for us.

And I told them, look, plan to play great. I believe in this team. Let me ask you, if we would have pulled this off, what would everybody in the country say? Oh, my God, they just played like that and won? You do not want to play them. That's what I told them after. We're fine. Let's go home. I would like to be home by 8:30 to see my dogs, kiss my dogs.

Q. How do you think you should be seeded tomorrow?

JOHN CALIPARI: Probably be a two, maybe a three. Who knows? I'm not in the room, but we'll see. My guess is it will be a very hard path because it always is.

Q. Coach, your regular season belongs to the bigs. The tournament belongs to the guards. Do you have to have great guard play to survive and advance in the tournament?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, but you better have a big too. Yeah, you have really good guards, but your big is not good enough, well, you ain't advancing either. You may go one or two rounds, but you're not going to be that Elite 8, Sweet 16 team. We have both. We have four point guards. Three of them play together at times, most times. We have three, four different guys that could play at four, so if one doesn't play well, I can go to another one and another one. Yesterday it was Jacob. Today it was Keion. We still had Davion, and I can also play Lance.

Lance played -- again, you're not saying that Oscar only played eight minutes in the first half. No one is saying anything, but that's a fact. He played eight minutes, and the reason was I wanted to give us a chance to win, which

I did by not playing him and giving him a third foul, so we had our chance. Best player in the country, and he fouls.

Q. Cal, you have talked about how many SEC teams you think should get in. Do you think that y'all, Auburn and Tennessee have all made cases that they could be on that two seed line come tomorrow?

JOHN CALIPARI: Auburn may be on the one seed line. You know what, Tennessee has played so well, but they say they don't do that anymore. Your last ten. They look at your body of work, you know, who you beat, your quad ones and all the other stuff they go with. I just wish they did some eye test, like watch. Forget about numbers. Do you know basketball? Watch the games.

Tennessee, could they be a one? I don't know. What have they -- I haven't -- if you know me, I'm not seeing it, reading it, hearing about. I don't really care. So our people were saying, hey, we have a chance at a one. I'm just trying to win a ball game. So what has Tennessee been? What has their seed line been? Could they move to a one? Maybe. If they're saying we were a one, they beat us 2 for 20 and big guy out in the first half and some other stuff, but they beat us. And Auburn has had a great year.

Q. Coach, back to when you guys went to the press a couple of possessions, did you feel like they were just too comfortable? What did you see there to finally go to the press there?

JOHN CALIPARI: We had to do anything to just kind of mix up the game and make a little run and put the pressure back on them. That's why we did it. We did good. We had our chances.

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