

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

**Arkansas Razorbacks**

**Coach John Calipari**

Men's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome to the podium University of Arkansas head coach John Calipari.

JOHN CALIPARI: Pleasure to be here. We scrimmaged Sunday in Hot Springs. I'm not going to say it was a debacle, but what would be the next word up from debacle? We got a ways to go.

I got a good group, but we got a ways to go to be what people think we're going to be.

Questions.

**Q. Bucky McMillan took over a roster, was empty, had no players. You have some experience with that. What does it take to start with an empty roster and make a successful run through the NCAA tournament?**

JOHN CALIPARI: We started 0-5 in our league, so it's not like we just went in and went up.

I really believe in what we do, you better be with good people, your staff and the players, that they take responsibility, that we all own what's going on, including them and the staff. When things get rough, it's what kind of hardens you to what this really is about.

The only people you can count on are the people in the room. If you're worried about all that other stuff, that's why I have on my wall: Coach your team.

None of the other stuff matters.

I would tell him make sure you got good people. Normally it's going to be rough early, then after that it gets better.

**Q. Now year three for D.J., what more are you wanting from him on the court and as a leader?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, when he became the point guard, we became better as a team. We just did. Everybody knew it. Now I want him to be more aggressive offensively. I want him to shoot balls that he has. They go under ball screen, shoot it. They go under a dribble handoff, shoot the ball. You come down in transition, they back away, shoot the ball. That means get in the gym and get more confidence.

I can't build it. He can do it. He's done it games. He is as good a kid as I've ever coached, works as hard as anybody I've ever coached. The breakthrough is all within himself. It's there. Now it's time to go show it all, so...

I'm just happy he's still with me and I'm coaching him. Love being around him every day.

**Q. Bruce Pearl retired a couple weeks ago. Tony Bennett. Jay Wright. Especially with the changing landscape now, how long do you see yourself continuing to do this with everything that's changed recently?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I want to help 25 to 30 more families. The only way you do that is you're transformational as a coach. You're not transactional. If I become transactional, I'm going to pay you this to do this and that, then I won't do this anymore. I don't need to.

I think all of those said I've done what I do, and I'm not willing to do all this to stay in the profession. If you watched us in practice, you would say he's still connected. I'll know before anybody else that it's transactional now. That's why if someone put their name in the portal, I said, You're not coming back because it's not going to be transactional. If this is what you want, let's go, let's work together.

I will tell you that all the issues we have, part of the reason I'm still doing this, my son is in coaching. Kelvin Sampson and I just talked. I said, We have to fix some of this stuff before we're out for our own children. Right now, the things we're dealing with, we want to put it to other people, but the thing is filtered down to the coach and coaches.



We talk about the transfer portal. I don't mind kids transferring. You just can't transfer four times because it's not good for you. Four schools in four years, you'll never have a college degree.

But that last place you'll be, they'll really be loyal to you, you're a mercenary, they're not going to be. We all -- maybe some of you not, but we all tried to get out of fast as we can. Some of you guys were the guys, I want to stay in school nine years, I guess.

Why would kids want to stay in school five extra years? For money. Well, we got to say you got five years to play four, and that's it. That's all. If we get those two things in order, we're on the path to being better.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JOHN CALIPARI: You're going to have to tell me what it would mean. What if a kid gets hurt two times? My thing with transfers, they should be able to transfer, once without penalty, then after that you can transfer, just you have to sit out, but you can transfer. I'm not saying don't transfer.

We're doing a disservice to these kids the way it's being handled right now.

**Q. There's been a lot of talk about tournament expansion. What is the right number of participants in the NCAA tournament, in your opinion?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I just think you leave it how it is because if it's not broken, go with the known, leave that unknown alone. We don't know what will happen to it.

I'm not worried about money or anything else. I'm saying that tournament. I still don't know what all this transfer stuff, all the eligibility stuff's going to do. It could be two. They could have a mid-major team that average age is 26, they're pretty good, and all of a sudden they get to advance. It may be NIL has killed all the mid-major schools. I don't know. It's going to end up playing out.

But I would leave the tournament alone, but that's just me.

**Q. Going back to D.J., where have you seen the growth the most?**

JOHN CALIPARI: I think he's more comfortable with himself. Like a lot of these kids get ranked, then they're trying to live up to rankings. What does the ranking mean? You got to go in and compete and take what you want, but it could be a burden.

I think with him, he needed to shed that and just be the

player he is. Let's see your best version. I believe his best version is being more aggressive, less dribbles, more attack. The things that he's doing, the way he leads. He's just matured.

Every kid is on their own path. Like, we tell every kid that I recruit: You plan on staying two or three years. If after a year you're good enough to leave, I got no problem with that. I'm not going to have you stay. I'm not going to force you out if I think someone is better than you. This is your path, not my path.

He was on a different path. His family is fine with it. His dad is fine with it. Some kids get impatient. I've had kids leave too early. I have.

I try to talk to them, but "I'm ready." Okay. NBA, no boys allowed. That's a man's league. You better have everything in order mentally, physically and skill-wise. If you don't, you're getting a short period of time and you're gone.

**Q. John Wall announced his retirement. Can you speak on his impact on the game of basketball, more specifically his impact on you?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, his mother was the greatest. He was with me because of his mother. She kind of said, That's where you're going. He did this one, all that. It went viral.

He and Eric Bledsoe. I called Eric on the way in. I don't know if he's still here. I haven't talked to him probably in eight months. I didn't know if he was in Alabama or not. They were two peas in a pod.

It was funny, one of their coaches, Why would you take both John Wall and Eric Bledsoe? They're the same position.

And I said to them, If two of your best players are the same position, what would you do?

Well, I'd play them both.

Well, that's what I'll do.

I said to Eric, How fast is John Wall?

He said, Oh, my, Coach, he is so fast.

Is he faster than you?

Oh, no, not faster than me.

They got along, and it showed who John Wall is. John Wall came in my office probably in January and said, Coach, we got to help Eric.

I said, Why?

He said, Because he doesn't think he's going to be in the NBA.

I said, He is.

From that point, he and I kind of built up Eric. It was him. He came to me with it. It shows you what he had grown into. Miss his mom, she was such a great lady.

For him, he's always stayed in touch. He's always been, like, Coach, what's going on? If anything happens for me, he's in touch with me.

He's a good one.

**Q. You added a lot of size and versatility to your front court. What were you looking for in particular?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I'm still looking for it. You have to have a post presence or your team's a fraud. It doesn't mean you just play all these guys that have the answer to how you play the game of basketball. You still have to be able to throw it to a guy in the post at times and get a free basket. We did it with Jonas at the end of the year, which is why we advanced.

I'm looking at this group and saying, Who do we throw it to here? We don't have to throw it 50 times, but there are times we got to get a free basket. That's what we want. We're still looking for it.

We should be a terrific rebounding team both on defense and offense. Right now we're not. I just told Seth, we did an inner squad, 15 clips where a shot was taken, not one guy went to rebound offensively. That can't be who you are.

**Q. You mentioned every guy you get, you tell them plan to be there two to three years. D.J., did you think he was a guy that would be on that path?**

JOHN CALIPARI: You don't know until you get the guy. You can think what you want, then you coach him, and it's got to be all three: physically, which includes the athletic part, being in great condition, and it takes mentally, are you strong enough for the ups and downs of what we're doing, and then the third thing is your skill level to the level that they're going to want to see.

I tell these guys, It's not what you want to show, it's what they want to see. You know what? Some guys have it faster, quicker. We've had guys drafted scoring nine points. As a matter of fact, I think Daniel Orton scored three points a game, drafted in the first round. None of that matters. It's what you do, does it transfer.

Is that it?

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

JOHN CALIPARI: Thanks.

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