

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, November 25, 2020

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky - 81, Morehead State - 46

Q. It seemed like early on, especially, a group of 10 guys making their debut, a bunch of them freshmen were pretty bought in defensively. Was that the thing you were maybe most encouraged about early on?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, what I was encouraged about is we looked like an organized basketball team. 10 guys, never played together, never played for me, we went 40 days of torture, yet they came out and, again, I've got to get, I got two or three guys that have to create new habits, and if I can get that, I like this group. We're going to have to figure out, what if they have a really fast and quick point guard? Who is guarding that guy? We need to throw it to the post more. Is it Olivier or is it Isaiah? I love what I saw from Cam today because he just plays hard. Davion did what I wanted him to do, make shots. That's what you do. Make free throws. B.J. missed all kind of shots, but I'm telling you, he fought on defense and he tried. We just, we got to be a better rebounding team, but that's going to come with time.

Q. I was going to touch on the rebounding part of it, but you started to answer it there, so I'll ask you about Dontaie getting his first action tonight, played six minutes, but hit a three when he was in there. I guess, how close is he to contributing more?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, he's, I got, guys, this thing is like, so I got to do this. All right. So I thought Dontaie did fine. He's just behind some other players. So, but he's going to get his chances. And I told these guys, everyone of you, just like every year I've been here, will have a chance. Will you be ready for your chance, or do you instead of fight, it's flight. Or is it delusion and I'm going to blame and -- you're going to get a chance. Like Cam has not done what he did today in the game. That's why he didn't go in earlier. But now, what he just did today, we're going to push him in there. Terrence, I thought Terrence played well. And Devin, Devin's going to be fine. He's got to create shots for his teammates. They will create shots for him. This isn't, I'm just going to go on five guys and try to shoot the ball.

And again, some of that is just how I played in high school. Well, okay, now, here's how we need you to play. I thought he played pretty good. Had a few turnovers he didn't need to have, but they got him threes, he made some shots. That's what we need him to do, so they know, if you leave him open, he's making it.

Q. I hope I can ask two. John, I wondered what you thought of the atmosphere today, tonight, in the game in the Arena. Did you hear me?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I didn't.

Q. I'm sorry. I just wondered what you thought of the atmosphere tonight, the unusual setting and everything.

JOHN CALIPARI: Guys, you got to figure out a better way of doing this because this ain't working. See somebody needs to be -- I can't hear. It's echoing, if it's there, so you can't do it that way.

Here's what I would say: You know, I don't know the protocol, but I know our university, from the president to our athletic director, has done an unbelievable job. The kids are disciplined and that's why we have kind of gone through this, including on our campus, like we have. It's incredible. I think now, how do we do the same with fans? Is there some way we can test where we can have 30 percent, where more fans can come and they feel comfortable coming because they're tested. How do we do that? I don't know. I don't have time. I'm trying to get a basketball team together. But what was, today was pretty fun. I would say this, when we came in yesterday and I saw all the cards with people's faces on it, the team went nuts. They said, Did these people buy these? These people are crazy. And then they went up there and sat with them. We put it out. And I looked and I said, Look, what a great idea by our university, by the athletic administration. Here's what I would say now: Why don't we try to sell the thing out with that? And I said, Going forward, Ellen and I will match whatever money they raise. So if you want to buy a thousand dollar seat on the floor, they have those. If you want to buy a \$350 seat in the first row with your kids and all that, \$70 seat deeper than that. Ellen and I, we're going to match whatever you pay, and



that way, again, help the athletic department, who came up with great idea. I love it. And it's funny, I just hope those people got to see themselves when it was shown on TV. Hopefully, they went and did a pan of the place so everybody got to see themselves.

Q. Looked like Olivier wasn't really even trying to force anything when they were doubling him early. What did you think of the way he played tonight and his willingness to pass to teammates?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, you're talking Olivier?

Q. That's right.

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, he still has some habits. I got to get him to just shoot a straight jump hook. The 15-footer he has, but when we throw that thing to the post, you can't step through step, step and -- you won't get that off in our league. The jump hook, you're seven foot tall, just do it. And if you miss it, go rebound your miss. The other guy that played, again, what I keep saying to him, Do what the game is telling you to do. B.J. didn't really force anything. He missed some shots. Not one was a forced bad shot. Not one. Can you imagine? And everybody's saying he's going to lead the nation in scoring. He didn't come out here to just to, I've got to score. I got to get back. He didn't play that way. I was so proud of him. I wish he would have played a little better offensively, made a couple more baskets. But Terrence, I mean, the people back in Boston watching what he did, he cramped up today because he's never played that hard for that long. He cramped up. Oh, that's not why. Oh, yeah it is. Your body looks at you and says, What in the world are you doing? You've never have done this before to me. But again, Isaiah, I thought fought and did good stuff and you see they're basketball players, but we got a ways to go. There were so many open shots that we gave up that they missed, that they were open. We got to look at the tape. Our pick and roll defense, bigs didn't stay long enough, guards didn't fight. I thought we scrambled pretty good. I thought we had tags on the weak side. The only reason that we trapped is I wanted to see if we could figure out how to rotate. And we did. We did a pretty good job. We went big-to-big, which I don't like because it puts both of our big guys on their big guy and any rebound they're going to get if they throw it out and shoot it, but I just did it to mix up the game a little bit.

Q. Isaiah looked like he tweaked his ankle. How is he doing? And the game looks like it comes really easy for Terrence. Does it?

JOHN CALIPARI: When he is in that frame of mind, Terrence, the game does come easy for him because he

can get wherever he wants. Most cases it's not enough. I got to add something, like right in front of our bench where he walked. Why would you do that? All you had to do was take it and drive like B.J. did and go right down the middle and shoot it. Not enough. A lot of these kids, it's one of the things they, you're creating a habit of attacking downhill. You're not messing with the ball. When you mess with the ball, it gives the defense time to get in. You see gaps and you take that gap, you get the ball by the man. He's learning. It's a new habit.

Isaiah did tweak his ankle. He was limping a little bit, but I would say he's okay.

Q. Wondering how you evaluate Davion's play? It looked like he talks both on offense and defense like you like.

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, the only play I got, went crazy about is we pressed and he was kind of behind his man and they threw it to his man. And the way they were scoring is we were fouling and giving them free throws. Don't, don't do that. And he pushed up and bodied a guy. I said, You're a senior, you know better than that. The guy caught it, now just play him. There are many games we're going to play that that could be the difference in the game, free throws. We're supposed to be that team that goes and shoots -- Terrence missed free throws today. He's a good free throw shooter, I don't know. I got so mad I screamed at him on the other one. He missed three in a row. Are you kidding me? What are you doing? And I screamed at him, Make the free throw. And he made it. But again, Davion, for this team, you see how important he is to this team, and a veteran presence, and he can, we can now flip him in and let Terrence play some point guard. So it's kind of a good thing and he's, I met with him today to just talk and he said, Coach, I trust you. Last couple guys that told me that it ended up kind of working well for Shai and Immanuel Quickley.

Q. Your leading rebounder today was your 6'7" shooting guard. Are you expecting more rebounds from guard play because of the length? And what does that do to your overall team aspect if you get that?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, we need our bigs to rebound better. But what I like is when a guard rebounds, they know they're allowed to bring it up and go. So if it's a 1, 2, 3 and they rebound, just go. So who was the leading rebounder as a guard? Who was it?

Q. B.J.

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah. And if you notice, I put him on



the baseline a bunch versus zone and man because of that. It's a way of getting easy baskets, especially when you go 0-4 from the three. I'm looking at you on the screen. That's why I'm looking that way.

Q. You kind of touched on it at the beginning, being a little bit surprised with the cohesiveness for a first time out with 10 new guys. You really didn't have any part of this game where there was a scoring drought or anything of that nature. Does that really surprise you for the first game?

JOHN CALIPARI: It really does, but, and they played zone. So now they're playing man and zone and pressing. I mean, you got to be organized. A couple times guys broke off and didn't do what we asked them to do and we end up throwing balls away and I had to stop them, Now, why did you do that? Now, you were supposed to do this, but you chose to do that. Why did you do that? And those are, again, guys being engaged with us and understanding, but the reality of it is what you said, we looked like an organized basketball team. Can you imagine? It's been 40 days. 30 practices in 42 days, and this is what we look like, so I'm happy. Now, when we start talking all these next games we're playing, I did these guys a disservice. I did my team a disservice. But I thought Keion would be playing. So I thought, you know what, we got some veterans and young, we'll be fine. Without Keion, it makes this schedule totally a different deal, and basically not really fair for these guys. No one's doing what we're doing. We're playing all these teams from here until we start our league. And when you got young guys that are -- young guys are fragile now. They're 18 acting like this. Yeah, get hit in the mouth twice and all of a sudden you're like, Oh, you see guys playing like that then (Indicating). And they're young. So I'm going to have to be as positive and patient as I've ever been and not, we didn't have exhibition to get going, we didn't have some games, three or four or five games that we should have. And then we start and we play those five. No. No, we got nine games and seven of them are ridiculous. And so it's going to be a tough road. And I would tell the fans, Don't you be mad at these kids. Don't be mad at them. Be mad at me. Then you start saying, all you out there, We want a stronger schedule. Why don't we play everybody? Okay, now we're playing everybody and you'll see the result. And that same guy said, Look, I want us to play good. I'm fine with that record because I'm the one that wants them to play all these tough games. I'm not getting mad at these kids. I'll get mad at Cal for playing that kind of schedule. What was he thinking? Instead of being tested for corona, I should have been tested for drugs or something.

Q. First of all, happy Thanksgiving and --

JOHN CALIPARI: Thank you.

Q. For the first game of the season, I thought your team looked pretty good. You should go into panic mode a little bit more frequently. When you made those comments the other day, you were obviously pulling our leg. How are you feeling --

JOHN CALIPARI: No, no, no --

Q. How are you feeling?

JOHN CALIPARI: I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll send all of you the scrimmage tape and you will say, How did that team on Sunday play like that and then come out on Wednesday and play like this? If I thought you wouldn't share it with all our opponents, I would really do that.

Q. I'll take you up on that. But how are you feeling emotionally after the performance tonight? Are you going to get some sleep tonight?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I'll be fine. But, you know, this has been a tough four, five days because Brad was coming home. Brad was going to play in Rupp Arena. Now, we're still going to schedule the game for the middle of December, so he'll be back. But, you know, I was looking forward to having my son on the other team, coaching my team and cheering for him. I mean, it would have -- you know, and then the one team, listen, there are four or five other teams I would say I would be happy for them to have to cancel, but not Detroit. That's the team I wanted to play. Not because I thought we could win. Mike's kid may have gotten 50 and Brad may have gotten 30 and we may have lost. But it was my son. And like I said, this, this going forward, we're going to have Thanksgiving tomorrow, we'll do video of this game and then we're moving on, we got a couple days to get ready, you know, Friday, Saturday for a really hard game on Sunday. And then we got another one, two days later that's ridiculous. And we're going to try and really try my best to have us travel on game days. I just don't want to be in a hotel in a city, food and workers and -- just too much. Our bus is going to deadhead to wherever we go. When that plane lands, we get on a bus that we know the bus driver's tested, we know it's a sterile bus and that's all we jump on. And then we get back on that bus and get on the plane with shields and masks. And I just want to keep these kids safe. They deserve -- listen, these kids want to play. And everybody would think, well, Cal, you want to play -- well what's the difference whether I'm coaching or not? I'm fine. I owe it to these kids to give them every opportunity to have this season and play. I'm doing everything I can. And they are doing everything they can. See, when you have a team like this, guys on this team have something at stake. Why would they break our



bubble and hurt themselves and their teammates? Why would they do that? I mean, they got too much at stake. And that's why I said, as we're playing the schedule we're playing, every other team's probably like ours. Kids are going to do everything they can to stay safe, because they got a lot at stake personally. Happy for our fans, too, today, the ones that came. What was the attendance? 12,000? What did it end up being?

Q. 3,075 is the max we can have.

JOHN CALIPARI: 3,075. How many cards, how many did we have?

Q. 800 so far.

JOHN CALIPARI: Guys, let's get it to 10,000. I'm -- when I said it, we'll match the money, I'm hoping no one buys any. But I'm saying, why don't we go and -- let's get 10,000 and have people say, Only at Kentucky. And they're 70 bucks. Christmas presents. Give them away for Christmas. Put your kids in the stands. We'll do some kind of surround so that everybody will get their picture, so you can see it. And then we're going to get the cameras from -- it will be all over ESPN -- like these dudes are crazy in this town. Buy them. Buy them. Let's get 10,000.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports....