

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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John Calipari

Press Conference



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Q. The offense is making easier plays with some of your guys. How is that helping build towards some of your other guys kind of getting to that point?

JOHN CALIPARI: We only had two turnovers, which is crazy. We had none at halftime. You're talking about a team that led the nation in unforced turnovers. So you could tell what the last two weeks, three weeks all I've been working on, making the easiest play, not trying to be a hero. If a guy's right in front of you, you throw it to him.

How about this? If you drive and your man or someone else's man is in front of you, for all you Basketball Bennys, what does that mean? You drive and there's a man in front of you and it's not your man.

Q. There's another guy open.

JOHN CALIPARI: There's somebody open because you got a guy that's not your man. We're getting better. The other thing is the execution and I'm demanding it. I mean, coming out of a timeout the Olivier play, the last play, for Davion, execution. You know why? They're worried about their team instead of themselves. Everybody's got a role. Jacob Toppin was ridiculous.

And, again, I told them, Whoever fights, I'm leaving in the game. I need fighters. Just like we did at Mississippi State. I need fighters. And if I play five guys the rest of the way, that's what we're going to do.

Dontaie broke down a ton today defensively. He made baskets and free throws when we needed it, but he may have given up as many as he scored. And I told him, I said, Look, if that's the case and it's even-steven, I'm probably good with you. But you got to get to where -- and they were game planning stuff. Like, he went under a screen, and he did, just did some stuff. But I'm telling you, he deserves to be on that court and you know what he does to the defense. He spreads out the defense. I ran a play for him, banged a three. Right to the top. Boom.

That may have been out of a timeout.

Q. Obviously you found a group that kind of works at the end of the game the last two games, but what's your message to B.J. right now? How is his confidence? There were some boos at one point in the first half. I don't know if you heard that or not.

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, look, I don't give up on any player and I believe in B.J. We have been working on B.J. to play a certain way, but he'll revert back to what he knows best, those flips, don't get fouled. I have -- you know, I mean, we -- and I told him, All the stuff we have been working on, you did none of it today. And I expected him to have a big game today because he's been so good in practice, so good in individuals, all the stuff the, coming to a stop in the lane and just to one, two stop, like a little floater, and he had two or three opportunities and he's trying to flip balls.

So, but he'll get it, and I believe in him. But, again, he didn't come out because of his offense. He came out because defensively they were going right at him. They went right to him. And he's got to take pride. Say you're not doing that to me, not at my length. I'm 6' 7" and got long arms, seven-foot wing span. You're not shooting layups. I'm not getting on your side. I'm not going to foul you. I'm going to give ground and be tough and bend over and defend. Capable of doing it, but it was, you know, I thought, again, I said to Devon and Davion, they had 22 points, five assists, no turns between them. Wow. I grabbed them after the game.

I told Isaiah how proud I was. How about Isaiah? Struggled early, had a little emotional thing on the bench, kissed him on the forehead, said, Look, I love you, kid, just come, back you'll be fine. And then he gets the biggest rebound of the game, the last one, above the rim, jerked it in, screamed for -- a will to win.

Q. You made 26 out of 32 free throws. Just, well everyone down the stretch. What, if anything, does that say to you?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well they're a three-point shooting team. So when you shoot -- how many threes did they shoot? 27? 28? So you're not, they're not going to have



as many opportunities. We were posting the ball and trying to drive the ball. I'm trying to really define how we're going to have to play and we're getting closer to it. So, and some of the stuff was out on the floor late, so I would say six of them.

But Davion and Devin and then Dante, now Dante missed one and there was a lane violation, so he had another opportunity, which became a big play because that last three could have been for a winner. But like I said, I'm getting a better feel, but we're going to have to fight now. We got the top of the league coming up, the best teams in the league, here they come, and, but in January we're 2-0.

Q. Along those lines, you've made this progress essentially without getting anything out of B.J. or Terrence because Terrence has been hurt and B.J.'s been struggling. Is there in some measure some encouragement there that these other guys have sort of dragged you guys along while you wait on those two to, for it to click?

JOHN CALIPARI: You know, what you do, well, Terrence is or -- he's out because he's hurt. Keion is out because he's hurt. B.J.'s just not playing well, but I've been, look, we can lie to kids or we can keep it real. If someone's playing better and tougher than you, they're going to be in there, especially the last five, eight minutes of the game. Just how it is. And he knows that. And I told him when I took him out, I said, Look, man, take pride in your defense. They're just coming right at you. And he will. I mean, he's a terrific player.

Do you know how hard this has been? How about they don't get a chance to play in front of 24,000? Do you know how much this team would need that? Do you understand that all this stuff, we didn't have team building and all the things that happened, and then emotionally and -- and our fans have been great, they haven't been burying the kids. They have been pretty positive with them. But you could tell that this stuff adds up. So now I don't want him putting too much pressure. Devin did that early, and I had to say, Come on, man, step back. I believe in you, but you can't be in the mindset you're in like every basket is life and death. You can't play ball.

Q. I was going to ask you about Jacob. Six points, six rebounds. Have all of your best teams had that energy guy that can come in? And are you surprised he's able to do that for you?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, because I've seen it. Now, I did tell him to fade away with the leg kick wasn't needed, when he got a post-up and he just turned and threw an air ball. I said, Why would you do that? Like, because you hadn't

shot it in a while? Come on, man, don't. And he has gotten so much better offensively. His decision-making, his ability to run downhill and get layups. How about his rebounding on free throws? I mean, you understand now he's gotten two of those in the last two games.

So I'm really proud of him and I told the team, the reason we won the game is Jacob guarded Pippen, and the only time Pippen got going is when Olivier stood straight up and down and backed away versus what we were trying to do, which is get up there and square it off. You know, that's when he scored.

But Pippen's, look, how many did he end up with? 20-some? 18? I mean, he's a good player. They're going to win games because they make shots. They made eight in the first half. I told the guys, every year we play them, guys, it's exactly the same way. They make all these shots and then we got to fight like heck and try to win a close game. Every time we played them last year, this year, the year before, every coach, not just this coach, the last coach and the one before that.

So I'm happy for the kids. It's a W. And now let's evaluate the tape. We'll grade the tape possession by possession to be able to tell the players: Here's the breakdowns. Here are the F's. Here are the A's. Here's the execution on defense. Here's the F in execution. What did we talk about? Why did you do this? Didn't we talk about it for two days? You chose to do what you wanted to do, not what the team needed you to do. And we're still in that mode. I mean, they probably had four of the eight threes because of our miscommunication or us being in the wrong spots, not where we were supposed to be. And kind of like Notre Dame. When you give that team open threes, what? They make them. Just like Notre Dame did to us. That was on us. We broke down.

Q. When you talk about Dante's defense, are his breakdowns something that will be hard to fix? And what did you think of his poise on offense?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, no, no. And he rebounded the ball. He got a couple rebounds. I'll give you an example: If your man was getting screened, he didn't have the ball, we're chasing that. He went inside and his man-made a three.

If your man was getting a dribble handoff -- do you know what that is, Larry? Like, the guy dribbles to you and he goes to hand it off.

Q. I do.

JOHN CALIPARI: We were not going over that. We were going under that. He went over that. If your man was

going through the lane to the weak side, you were to stop with both feet in the lane on the other side of the basket to where you left. Not, well he went out there twice, outside the lane, and wasn't ready to switch to a guy that he needed to switch to because he wasn't where he was supposed to be.

And again we spent two days on it. But he wasn't the only one. Isaiah did it, Davion did it a couple times. But he had some breakdowns. But you know what, like I told him after, You had seven or eight breakdowns, nine, eight. Let's just get it to four. And then keep making shots. Just keep making shots, kid. And the team laughed.

I mean, look, you got to give up something sometimes and he's trying and he's got a lot of courage, but like I said, our breakdowns wasn't just him, but I want everybody out there to know, look, what he's doing for us, we can't replace it.

So I got to figure out how I get him better on defense or more comfortable.

Q. It seems like with every passing game you are really starting to trust Devin and Davion in the back court to be able to make plays for you guys. That final play, to be able to trust those two guys to make that shot and Davion to be able to hit it.

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, here's what I'm doing: I'm giving them stuff to run, because I want to do less and I need them to do more. That, here's the stuff we're running, you run what you want. But here are the two or three things we're going with.

And then there may be a timeout and I say, Okay, let's do these couple things now. So if we have it in transition, you know what it is. If not, at a dead ball, here it is. And I let them make those choices.

We did miss a bunch of layups now today, we probably missed four or five. And maybe those should be runners versus layups because of our size. But like I said, I'm happy for the kids, B.J.'s going to be fine. We need our fans to absolutely support B.J. I don't know why anybody would just want to be nasty to anybody. If you want to be nasty, be nasty to me. It's my fault. Don't be nasty to him. I'm the one that put him in the game. So if you're mad, just be mad at me. Be positive.

Everybody left Devin alone. When Devin struggled early, no one really got on Devin, our fans left him alone, they let him do his thing. And look where Devin is now?

And now I'm saying the same thing. Our fans haven't been bad on B.J., they've been pretty good. Because they're

good people. They're not nasty, they're not trolls, it's not who they are.

So now you'll see him begin to come -- and you know what, you feel like you played a part in it. It's like you're in this building and 24,000 with us here, with us not here, it's a different game for us.

But I say it again, it's a good win, we got tough games coming up, all I'm trying to do every day: How do I get these guys better, how do I get them to understand I believe in them, how do I get them to understand they must execute on both sides of the ball for us to have that chance that we want to do something unique and special. Thanks.

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