

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Saturday, February 13, 2021

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky Wildcats 82, Auburn Tigers 80

Q. You talked a lot about mental health and concerns. Curious what you think this can do for the team just finally winning one. What was the locker room like?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: Well, here it's as much -- they are finally playing together. They have to have rewards. We've been making strides for three weeks, but you've got to have a reward at the end. And so because all the hard work, all the extra conditioning they are doing and shots, and then sacrificing for the team, you've got to have some reward, and you've got to win somewhere.

And again, you know, we kind of -- we had our marks again. We had to reel it back in a little bit but you know, and again, here's the play. Davion, wide open at the top of the key, what? Doesn't shoot it. Throw it is to B.J.

Wide open, what? Doesn't shoot it. Davion gets it. What's he do? Turns it over. That's -- or it's a bad shot.

Every good shot we had late that we missed, if you were watching the game, what did we do? We rebounded. I mean, but you can't rebound a bad shot or a turnover. And I just keep, you know, harping on it.

Then the great news? Davion came back and made that three at the top. That's a big play for this team and it's a big play for Davion. B.J. is playing so much better. You know why? He's playing for his team. All the stuff you saw early on, which was like an AAU game, you're not seeing it now. Now he's playing for his teammates.

And again, a couple rebounds, he and Jacob both and even Keion, a couple rebounds we needed to get. But you know, overall, 15 assists and 13 turnovers we're getting closer; last game, 11. I'd like it to be 10 to 12, but the press, the throw-ins and some of that got us.

Q. I was going to ask you about Davion's shot and whether that's one of the daggers you've been looking for, but also, keeping Cooper off the foul line, he didn't

shoot a free throw the whole game, how big was that?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: It was big. And again we gave him space. He hit a couple threes but you've got to live with that and he hit one because we didn't play it right. Went under a pick-and-roll, and when he gets a clean look that way, he makes it. But he's a terrific player. He creates free throws, he creates free throws, he creates shots and he gets to the rim. So he makes them go.

Q. You talk so much about playing through the post. How much of that first four minutes of the second half when you played through Olivier and he got open shots on the perimeter for other guys, how much is that what you envision the offense to look like?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: Did you see a little -- there's two things that we tweaked offensively. We did some stuff we haven't done before. Did you guys see it? Don't laugh -- you don't have to laugh at them.

So we did some things post-wise and pick-and-roll wise that was different. And the greatest thing about this team is they respond. They listen. They are smart. And so we were able to -- we're still tweaking how we're playing, but, we're playing through post if we can, and now we did some things that if you try to front us, we'll do something different. Here's how we'll play it.

But I'm -- like I said, I respect this group. I respect them because of what they have gone through. The Kentucky experience coming in the summer and fall and really getting training and weight training and team building and all that we do, our fans, 24,000 deep, getting us to the finish line of games, which they have done over my 12 years here, like I can't begin to tell and you even more so when we go on the road and half the building is Kentucky fans. Or we go to the league tournament and there's 19,000 fans, 17,000 are our fans. They are raving fans and things are positive. It's unbelievable -- well, the raving part, when it's not going so good, they are still raving.

So we're only hearing that side or feeling that for these kids, who are 18, 19 and 20. They are not me as an adult, like I'm the worst coach ever, I could never coach -- okay. That's fine. I agree with you. Can we move on? That's my

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answer to it. "I'll agree with you, what you're saying about me, I'm the worst ever. I agree. Can we move on now?"

Well, these kids are 18, 19 and 20. And I told them, for what we've done, the breaks we've had go against us, and you still fight and you still do extra work and you still condition? I respect these guys.

Q. Davion has been a guy who clearly is willing to take that shot at the end who is obviously capable of making that shot at the end. I know he's also a guy with the NCAA rules can comeback next year. Have you started selling him on being your sixth-year senior anchor?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: I'm worried about Vanderbilt right now. I'm not worried about next year. I'm just telling you guy, right now, I want this team to finish and be something people talk about for the next 20 years. I'm trying to get them to believe what I believe. And I'm trying to motivate them that way. I'm trying to hug them and be positive.

Yet, here's the tightrope, guys. You've got to hold them accountable. If you're working on stuff and they just try to do their own thing, it is not acceptable. If you're getting beat to every ball, we're holding guys accountable. But, by holding them accountable to be a team to be tough to come up with balls, we're working on it every day so they can carry over and do it in the game.

But again, I'm looking at this group, all of them, and just telling them, man, there's no team in the country that's ever gone through what we are just going through. Now, you can say, wait a minute, other teams are going through this. Not at Kentucky. Not at Kentucky. And you know what, my hope now is, these kids get it, and we can look back, but I'll tell you, we've got another tough game and another tough game and another tough game. There's no easy games. And we've just got to worry about us getting better.

If we continue to grow and come together as a team, and limit these turnovers, because we are not trying to be heroes, we are trying to play basketball as a team and keep defending and blocking shots and rebounding, winning will take care of itself. You play four --

Q. If you're keeping it --

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: -- you play four ranked teams and an NCAA tournament team, back-back-back-back, I remember two years ago we did the same, or three years ago, and we lost four in a row. We lost four in a row because of who we played and where we played them and then by the end of the year, you know what we had our chance.

Q. Circling back on Davion, if you are keeping it focused on this year, how significant is it just for this year then to find a guy who will and can make that shot at the end?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: Well, that's big for us. You still remember the Vanderbilt game, we did a little hammer screen on the weak side and he knocks it down and ended the game. The one he made today, those are daggers. It takes a unique guy, and I'll tell you why: They can't be afraid to miss the shot. That's the one that will make it. If the guy's eyes are like this and his mouth's moving, probably afraid he's going to miss the shot, all route. Now, that guy ain't making it; oh, was it so close. Yeah, but the dude that's not afraid to miss, I'll deal with the miss, but I'm shooting this and this is a dagger. Proud of him.

Q. You had a tough time shooting the three all year. Now the last two games, you've made 14 and 11. What's been the difference there?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: Well, what have I been telling these kids?

Q. Shoot it. If they go over ten, it's on you, not them.

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: Just. Keep. Shooting.

And when they don't shoot, I take guys out of the game. Now you've got to have courage. He's making me shoot this. I might as well try to make it. There's no faking. We're not faking this stuff. You are a good player, you can make those shots. I'm not -- I was asked this question: You know, you tell them to shoot. What happens when they take a bad shot?

When you watch me, I don't say one thing on a bad shot, not one thing, because I don't want it to be an excuse; well, that's why I thought it was a bad shot. No, I ain't saying anything on a bad shot. Shoot it.

Why, John?

It may go in, banker, which Jacob made last game. It may not go in --

Q. Might rebound it --

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: -- and we can rebound it, or they can rebound it and we've got everybody back.

What's a turnover lead to? Baskets down the other end. What does a bad shot -- we can't rebound a bad shot. There's no rebound for it. And we're out of position to get



back. So part of it is that and them -- the other part is we're trying to play faster.

Here is what happened, we started fast and we missed three open threes, okay. And then we slowed down. I'm looking at these dudes, stop.

What I told them prior to the game, I want to see guys smiling. If you're not smiling, I'm taking you out of the game. Smile. Smile. Have fun with this. We're tweaking. We're trying. We're practicing. We're fighting. We're having individual meetings. I have you on the couch with a wet rag on your head, I'm doing everything, hugging, hug the guy, kiss the guy on the fore -- we're doing everything. Smile. Smile.

What do you want this picture to look like? What do you want it to look like? Well, we can do whatever we want. We're good enough to play with anybody in this league and we're good enough to get beat by anybody in this league.

Q. I'm with you, I completely respect this team a lot, they are 6-13 yet they continue to fight and of course you've got a lot of games where you've lost within one possession and they could have easily have given up. What are you saying during practice, before the games, halftime, to keep them fighting the way that they are?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: Well, one of the things, like I told them before this game, you've got to look at this game as though we won the last play, that play -- that block was a jump ball and we won the game. How would you be feeling about this game now?

In this sport, when you play this many games, you can't let a loss lead you to another loss, whether you're coaching or playing. And for me, I just want to keep painting the picture is, that I believe in you. We have some flaws. We have some limitations.

But guess what? So does everybody else. We also have enough -- I've done this now 30-some years. We have enough to win the mental toughness, physical toughness is the thing that's still in flux. Par if we ever get that, like today it was Isaiah. The rest of the guys couldn't come near a ball but Isaiah did. But what if we had two or three guys playing like Isaiah? You could have a bad shooting night and still win.

So you know, I just stay on them. I'm meeting with them individually. My concern individually is just tell me how you are. I mean, really tell me. How are you getting through this is, are you looking at any of the social media? No. Are you looking at it -- because if you are, you're not very

smart. Leave it alone.

And again, how are you letting steam off? I'm having no -- this stuff is different. I mean, like I said, they have got nowhere to go. They can't even be in each other's rooms. They can't be with the girlfriend. They can't be with their families. I mean, this group, this young -- being what they have been through and doing what they are doing, I'm proud of them.

This may be one of those years, if we keep this going, that I talk about this was the greatest year for me ever. Yeah, now, to say, you're the worst coach ever -- I agree with you. Can we move on you don't know how to coach, play -- you're right, I agree with you, let's move on.

All I can tell you is this team's fighting for the university, for the state, for the athletic department, they haven't given up one bit, and neither has our staff. Thanks.

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