

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky Wildcats 92, South Carolina Gamecocks 64

Q. What did you think of Davion's shooting display early in the second half? How hot was he in your eyes?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: I don't know if you saw us in the huddle where he drove by me and didn't pull up, and I told them a story in the huddle. I said, "In 1995, we're playing Xavier, in Xavier, in the hockey arena, whatever that building was called." We fought the whole game and Xavier had us and he runs by me, Edgar -- I said, don't you shoot it, don't you shoot it, he shot it and made it and we won the game.

Davion ran by me, and I didn't see that. I just said, "Easy now. Easy. Easy." So I told him the story in there, but no, I'm happy for him. I thought guys played better. I'm liking the fact that we went zone. Now you hear me the whole game, swinging, because it not what they do naturally. Every one of them gets the ball and holds it. So we are having to encourage them, pass it. How about this, ball fake, you don't have to pass and swing. You can grab it, ball fake, and then throw the other way, pass fake, throw the other way, or just get rid of it or how about this one, shoot it. Or catch it and drive it. You cannot catch it and hold and start pointing and you know, or look to the post, look to the post, look to the post. You can't play that way against the zone.

And so we got better and you know, we made some shots. But again we had 17 assists and some of the terms we had, you know, we're in the last five, six minutes of the game. So the press didn't hurt us. It was -- we rebounded better in the second half than we did in the first, and it's a good send-off for us. I got to play Lance. I got to play Dante and again, I mean, poor Dante and I love the kid. He and I have talked individually but it was so much on him that -- let him go shoot every ball. And these kids, they are -- you know, they know, you know, who they are, what they are, what they can do, and any time you're trying to have a kid do more than he is, it's just -- it's not fair to the kids, and so what I said today and I told them, I'm playing you. I

don't we're if you miss shots, make them; shoot the ball. We're in practice, encouraging them to shoot because there may be a game coming up where he needs to go in and bang a couple threes because we're dying right now, and we needed him and I wanted to play Cam. Cam did fine. A little bit winded. The other thing is, normally we're in games like this throughout the year where I can play Riley and Brennan and this is like the first chance they got to play, last game of the regular season. And so you know, now it's, you know, day off and two days to get ready to try to play in a tournament we've had success in. I wish it was a full house because we'd have 17,000 fans there. By hope is our fans figure out a way of getting in, anyway. Sneak in, jump through windows, do whatever. Have your mask on so they don't know it's you. Get in there.

Q. What do you think this kind of win can do for your team's confidence? Was today the team you thought we were going to see all year?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: Well, you know, the last two games, you had a chance to win both of those games and if we had done that, we'd all be saying, like, wow, and so I keep coming back to, when you're in this boat and it's hard for young kids, you have to take the approach that, all right, how would you feel if we won those two games. Where are would my mind-set be, because that's where it's got to be. You have to have that kind of confidence that -- and the biggest thing, again, I wanted them to make a run, and they did. They made a couple runs. They got it and then we spread it out. We made shots.

Somebody asked me last night, well, who do you go to when you want to stop the bleeding? Who do you go to when you -- game-to-game. In Tennessee Davion spread the game out for us. This game, he spread the game out for us. And then Isaiah rebounded and went crazy on the backboard and you know, didn't give them second and third chances.

Q. You were talking yesterday having the mentality of being 0-0 heading into the postseason. How hard is that, that amnesia? What's the key to pulling something like that off because even when you have great years you have to convince your team you're 0-0.



COACH JOHN CALIPARI: We're just -- it's one game and our first game I'm hearing, it could be one of four or five teams and that first game is going to be ridiculously hard but good, it will be hard for that other team, too. I'm not thinking they are looking forward to seeing my team, especially coming off this kind of game. But, you know, it's one game, four times. One game. We're not -- we're going to probably play the first game, noon. We're not even going to know who our game is until four. And so it's one game. And then you know.

Q. I wonder, as you've watched B.J. kind of ride the roller coaster this season, and a kid, you talk about somebody who had a lot on him, he put some of it on himself when he came out and publically said I want to be the best player ever, that's a lot to say for a kid and obviously that's been mocked some since then. But that comment to be that kind of expectation and go through what he's gone through, is it hard to do what he did today to be in it enough to perform --

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: Let me tell you why I stick with -- every day I look in that gym whether it's after practice or morning, he's in there. Here is the issue for him. It's not mental. It's physical. He's physically not able to do what his mind is telling him to do. I'm trying to get him to make the easiest plays, catch-and-shoot, one-dribble pull ups. If you get to the rim try to get fouled because it's not anything mental. It is more physical and that, you know, it holds him back a little bit at this point.

But he's never lost the fight. This stuff has been hard for him. And it's also eye-opening to know as an individual player, man, physically, this thing, I'm not where I need to be physically. And so you know, we've had other guys, it was like Emmanuel -- this is way harder than I thought and I didn't have a good year but I'm coming back, and you watch, no one will out-work me. Those are the guys that should comeback, that mentality, P.J. Washington, that mentality. I'm not coming back to do show time. I'm not coming back to say, hey, this is my team.

I am coming back because I'm going to get better and I can accept that I didn't play the way I needed to play. And this is way harder than I thought.

Q. Are you hoping then that P.J. is a guy that's willing to say that to you?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: Again, every kid -- I'll spend three minutes with each of these kids. I don't spend that much time on this. I'm not trying to -- I like when kids go through the process because teams aren't going to lie to them. They are going to tell them the truth. Going through the process is good. So you know, whether it's any of

these guys, you know, you can't be delusional because if you are, it will catch you. You have to be real and you can't blame anybody for your performance. You own it. And then you say, here is what I can do and how I can get better. But like right now, I'm not worried about that and neither are these guys. They are worried about taking a day and a couple practices and let's get ready for a tournament one game at a time, one game, four different days.

Q. You mentioned Cameron got some clock today. How has he been doing? How is his attitude and how has he been doing in practice?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: I'm so proud and I brought it up four or five different times to the team, how is his attitude, and they all clapped. He has been positive, upbeat. It has been a total transformation from when I had to tell him, you need to take some time. Total. Because he knew, you're not doing that.

Where we were after the North Carolina and games with attitudes and where we are now -- I wish we had the summer and the fall -- so that we could work on the habits and have kids understand how you respond, how when there's something around you, the thing that you own is your response to it.

He's been fabulous and I told him I wanted to get you in. I want you to play. So he was good. Lance was terrific today. You saw him go in and fight. He grabbed a ball from the different guys, and that's who he is. He missed a basket or two, but look, we need the guys that will go in and fight. Devin was better. I think putting his minutes down a little bit made him fresher and made better decisions.

And Jacob, you leave him off, but what he does defensively, his length on the court, we're really long now. You've got a point guard and one guy is 6-7, 6-9, 6-8, and the other guy is 7 foot, we're really long.

Q. Your teams have had so much success in the SEC tournament but the one year you had to win to get into the NCAA it didn't go as well. How do you get guys to buy into one game at a time?

COACH JOHN CALIPARI: We talked to the team -- there was another year, the year we had five freshmen play, they made us an 8 seed and we went to the Final game, so you're not accurate in what you're saying there.

But it's been -- every team I've coached, at the other two schools, too. We were in the same position that when you look back, we have gone through the war and we have



been scarred, but it prepares us. Every game we play ends up being a two-bucket game right down to the stretch.

And we're fighting with every team, and you know what, that's what prepares you.

Now you're better off winning because you'll have a little different attitude, but that only comes into play if they make a run at us is, I've got to convince them in those huddles to stay the course, to stop the bleeding, to make the easiest plays. Someone make a basket or two. We're fine. That will be my job.

But you know what they are prepared, just like all the other teams here, I think we've been in the Finals in the last ten years a bunch, and you know what they went through the same wars that this team went through. The only difference is, about four of them or five of them that we could have won, those teams won. We happened to drop. Everybody says what happens the last three minutes, they make a run and you falter, well, part of that is starting 1-6. Hard to build confidence when you're 1-6.

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