

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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John Calipari

Press Conference



Blue 108, White 80

JOHN CALIPARI: -- let's just get back to normal. I mean, he's 255. The biggest thing, do you see how hard he plays, how fast he runs, how nimble his feet are for 255?

Yeah, you better put a body on him. He's still learning to get balls with two hands. He's been a one-handed rebounder, and it's been hard for him. But he's starting to snatch balls. When he does, a couple balls on lobs he needed to catch and come down. He tried to tip them in one-handed.

He did good things. He can shoot the ball. You saw the 15-footer. Surprised he missed a free throw. But again, the good news for him, he's got to go against Lance. The good news for Lance is he gets to go against Oscar. The bad news is he's got to go against Oscar.

Q. It is good to be face to face again, but every year you tell us defensively it's going to be a good team. Kind of hard to tell out there tonight. How good is this team going to be defensively?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I just said this. I'll say to you, all you Basketball Bennies, if you got a group of players, they're always pretty equal, they can score, they're pretty good, what will differentiate the team? Who plays more and who plays less? Toughness, rebound, defense. Talk, because we're a better team on defense, a guy chatters. He's a better defender. That guy's going to play more than the other guy.

We're going to have some guys, got a couple that we're just telling them, Look, just shoot it when you get it. If you can't, maybe take a bounce and pass it. We're going to have a couple of those. Those guys can really shoot.

But the reality of it is, you and I know, yeah, you got to score, but it's about defense and stopping people and taking pride. Everyone says, You're really fast. Yes, if you'll rebound and defend, you can be fast. If you have to take it out every time, you're rushing up against five guys,

it's like basically four because the guy that took it out is behind versus five, it's hard to get anything.

We got a lot of work to do. That's the other thing, when I watch the tape, I thought we were pretty good offensively. Then I'm like, Is that because we're bad defensively? Like I don't know until I watch the tape.

Q. What is it like to have this much depth? You didn't even have CJ, tonight.

JOHN CALIPARI: Or Jacob.

Q. Right.

JOHN CALIPARI: The best thing that's happened is the competitiveness has raised the level. You can see. Like if you don't play hard in these practices or fly up and down the court, you just look bad. So it forces guys. They're forcing each other to be uncomfortable. Instead of me having to do it, they're doing it to each other. Now you start being comfortable being uncomfortable, now you got it. Now it's a wrap.

They're running. How about TyTy? He pulled up a couple. I looked. Went right down. I said, All right, if that's how far out you can shoot, then shoot it.

Bryce's physicalness. We still have a couple guys holding the ball too long. That's an easy one. That's easy. You can cure that. But I like the fact that guys are driving catches. Keion played way better in the second half. He played okay in the first half, but he played the way we need him to play.

One of the guys said, Can you play four guards? Well, if Bryce, Daimion and Keion could be your four yet shoot the ball well and stretch the court, why do you need four guards? You're fine.

How about Daimion today? I mean, he's not going to play 40 minutes in a game. He played every minute. Even in the end was shooting the ball well. He's gotten so much better. He's defending better, rebounding better. I don't even know, how many rebounds did he have?



There you go.

Q. Wheeler seemed to be in that kind of attack mode that you've been asking these guys to be on both ends of the floor. Talk a little bit about what you liked about his play.

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, he had 12 assists and three turns. That's what he's got to do. I liked it. The trouble he got into is he got too deep. If you get that deep at his size, you got to keep going.

This is what I love about the kid. I said, This is what we need to do. He did it. He went right underneath the basket and threw the ball, an 8-footer, we missed it. But he did right, the guy shooting the ball did right, it just didn't go.

The other thing I told him is, Look, when you and TyTy are out there, TyTy has to play like he is when you're not out there. You got to find him, you got to throw it ahead, let him be a finisher at times. Kind of like when he had John and Eric, you just got to figure stuff out, when we had the different guard combinations.

I thought Kellan did fine. Kellan, he's a smart player. He's getting shots off quicker. He's playing fast, yet being comfortable doing it. But I got to watch the defense because that third position, I would say Sahvir and TyTy. Is it Kellan? Is it Bryce? How are you doing this?

The 4 position, who is it going to be? You and I would say Oscar seems to be the 5. Now we got to make sure he and Sahvir don't get in foul trouble. They are on the ball and near the ball all the time, both of them. Got to play without fouling.

But you're seeing Lance. How about if you wanted to go with Daimion as the 5? He's kind of skinny. Put some strong guys around him so he can be who he is, they can be who they are.

Q. Arena was only half full. What did you make of that?

JOHN CALIPARI: How about this? I want to know if anybody in the country could have a scrimmage that you have to buy tickets to, could have that many people. Tell me that school.

These weren't free. You had to pay for the tickets. That's why I said, These people are crazy. They come to this, they come to Madness. They're excited about it. I was just in Louisville. Everywhere I'm walking, people are going crazy. They're so ready for basketball.

That's what makes this what it is. I was so happy to walk out and see that many people. Inner squad scrimmage, what in the world?

Q. You have a ton of shooters this year on your team.

JOHN CALIPARI: We need makers.

Q. They're makers.

JOHN CALIPARI: We got some makers.

Q. You haven't had this many shooters in a while here. Do you remember the last time you had this many guys you felt comfortable with?

JOHN CALIPARI: Probably '14/'15 when we had Darius and Doron and Terrence and that crew. They could shoot the ball well. Marquis Teague. My first team could not shoot the ball well. We did not. But we weren't a great execution team.

I've had some. I've had a couple teams when I was back at UMass that could really shoot the ball. It makes it easier. Makes it look like, Man, he's got great offense, he's got this thing going.

What if you played this fast and missed shots? Now it's, What's wrong with this? Making shots makes up for a multitude of sins. Now you have a bunch of guys. All right, who plays? Come back to. Who defends? Who rebounds? Who talks on defense? Who makes easy plays? Who gets the ball moving? That will play out as we go.

Davion, I'll tell you what, him having to go against Sahvir. C'mon now, this guy... He held his own. He got tired. He missed a lot of shots. But he was exhausted. As a matter of fact a couple times he told Keion, Bring it up.

Let me say this with Sahvir, it's nice when you got a guy that can absolutely control the ball. Now, how many minutes can he play right now? I'm looking at a team that if they could play 24, 25 minutes, in a real game, that's a lot of minutes for a young group like this.

But we'll see. I mean, this will all play out. I like 'em. I like this team. Every day I walk into practice, I know what I'm getting. There's no confusion. Here is what we're doing, guys, let's get after it. They want to scrimmage. When I say, Stop, they say, Keep going, coach. Anytime it's five-on-five, they do not want to stop. They're veteran, and there's 10 of them. Really there's 12. They want to go at each other. It's the best way to practice.

Now, when you have a lot of young guys you can't do it because you have to have them create winning habits, and they don't have them. Veteran players have those habits already. Footwork, how to truly stay in front, how to body up guys when they drive, how to play without fouling.

Bryce got beat on about five backdoors today. He's behind in those kind of habits. This team wants to scrimmage. We're going to practice tomorrow at 11. They're like, Okay, we'll be ready. I got to go back and watch the tape. Hard for them because their body is racing right now. It's going to be three hours before they can even knock out, maybe longer.

Q. You've been doing this a long time. You seem confident the lineup and playing time will shake out. What if all these guys do all the things they say you're going to do?

JOHN CALIPARI: I will figure it out. I have in the past. I will figure it out.

If 12 guys deserve to play, we'll figure it out. But I'm challenging them. No excuses, I don't want to hear I've been giving them this. A hundred man marching band and they are marching all hundred. 99 turn right and you turn left, and your people say, What's wrong with those 99?

Like this is cut and dry. This is what it is. We got a lot of fighters. Now you're in that kind of battle. That will elevate us. If you have to figure out ways of getting guys minutes, I'll figure it out.

I don't want to say it will just work out because what if we have 10 guys, 11? How would we do it? Do you think I've been thinking about it? Yes, I have been thinking about it. But what's my druthers? Seven or eight.

These kids deserve it. They'll have that opportunity. I will tell you of the 10 that played today my guess is nine will have started in a game this year. At the end of the year you can check out if I'm right. Maybe 10. So you'll have your chance to prove yourself.

Q. With TyTy Washington, in terms of his feel for the game, how advanced do you feel like he is for a freshman?

JOHN CALIPARI: I hate to start naming names for the guys. You know my guys that did it. I've had guys that have walked in and been able to do it.

But he can score the ball on all levels. You know what else he can do? He can pass. Like they scrimmaged the other day. I put he and Sahvir against each other. Guess what?

His team won and he didn't take one shot, TyTy did not take one shot, and they won big.

He just plays the game. He was at an All-Star event, barely played in the first half, barely played, didn't say one word. Came out and got 22 in the second half. He wasn't forcing, he just played. He's comfortable in his own skin, has a great smile every day, comes to play. Competitive now, has a little chip on his shoulder. You come at him, he's coming back at you.

We need guys to step up. Kellan and Tyler stepped up. We didn't know. They just took their stuff and went like that. We need some of these guys to do the same.

Oscar is who he is. Let's see, we may not get that much every game. Let me just say this to you. Someone got to play the guy.

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