

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, December 22, 2021

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Coach John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky 95, Western Kentucky 60

Q. Cal, how much when (indiscernible) is shooting like he has the last two weeks just kind of open up things for everybody in your offense?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, when you -- again, we're not a team -- we only took 20 threes. You know, You should be taking 40 threes. No, no. You're trying to win at the highest level.

There are games you're going to take 20, 15, maybe 22. Any time my team has taken 30 threes we've lost. Now, maybe it's the way I coach, I don't know. But what we did today was we continued to pass to each other. We had one guy that drove some passes that he could have made that led to turnovers that led to them getting back in before the half.

But the reality is we had 27 assists. That's how you play basketball and that's how you create for each other.

Q. You put Oscar back in there. Did you want to let him chase some more? Was he going for 30, and what did you make of just...

JOHN CALIPARI: I got mad because we had some guys, your minutes, and if you're not going to play you're out. I'll put the guys back in. I'm not settling for that. There is a high standard here. Then a minute later I put them back in.

But I think you got to hold kids to a standard and hold them accountable, so I took them out and then I put them back in.

They wanted me to leave them in to go get 30 rebounds and I just didn't want to do it. I said 28 is enough. Leave them alone.

Q. What did you think of that effort? 28 is the record.

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, in the first half -- and we told them, you know, you better shoot it quick on this kid because if

you try to bounce it and move he's just seven foot; he doesn't move.

The kid blocked the shot and made it hard. When he was able to catch it and go right to the basket he scored, but in the first half they out-rebounded us.

Rick went to that 1-3-1. It confused us a little bit. We were able to talk about it at halftime. I said at halftime, They're either going to do one of two things: They're either going to go man to man or they are going to (indiscernible), and they went man to man.

And so we were trying to run some of your grinded stuff to create opportunities, and the kids did well. How about Kellan Grady? How about Jacob Toppin? And it's not his skill. It's just energy, you know, getting after it.

Now, he had some breakdowns. There were some rebounds he needed to go get. But his energy was terrific. Or speed with Sahvir and TyTy. Kellan flies. I was happy to see Davion make a shot or two.

You know, look, we're a good team. I always say is it your opinion or your hope? We're a good team. When we pass the ball and play this way, we're a good team.

And so like I said, it's a great way to go to Christmas, you know, back-to-back two really good games and unbelievable energy. You know, it's good to go to Christmas.

I mean, I told them, you know, how many of you guys -- this morning at the shoot-around, how many of you guys are ready to go for Christmas? Who was the first person to raise their hand? Me. Me, I'm ready.

They all laughed and they said, We're all ready. Well let's have a great game so we could have a good Christmas. A great game means we're going to be the best defensive team and play extremely hard, harder than the guy we are playing, and they did it.

Q. I hope I can ask two questions. Just a few games ago Kellan was struggling with his shooting. What you did think made the difference there?

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

JOHN CALIPARI: You know, he and I went to the gym and I worked with him. (Indiscernible - audio cut out.) Not really. I took him out at North Carolina. He passed up on two shots, you're out. I won't pass them up again. How many has he passed up to step out of bounds in the corner?

Now, the other thing was the reason you're having to pass up a shot, you're catching it like it's HORSE game and you're dropping it before -- now he does it. When he's open wherever he catches it, he shoots it from there. Well now you're going to get it off.

I'm trying to get Davion to do the same thing, because he drives by jump shots, and now you put yourself in jeopardy. And those turnovers end up being breakouts, so just shoot it. In the second half Davion put the shot at the top of the key. He missed it, but we rebounded it. Kicked it out and Keion ended up getting the three points. Now, he could have driven it and turned it over and breakout. That's why I'm saying shoot balls.

Q. The other question I wanted to ask, you had 27 assists. How does that number play on your mind?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, we're trying to get 18 a game. 20 would be better, but 18.

And part of it is you got to make the baskets. So it's hard to get assists when you go two for 19 or you can miss a jump shot or you miss and stick back easy baskets. It's hard, so you got to make baskets.

How about this? You got to make the pass, and the only way we'll he'll get open is if you're not trying to make the play yourself. You're just giving it up and moving it. We got ball movement. We then drive, and all of a sudden the guys that collapsed on the weak side, we get a good shot on a good pass.

Q. Can you just look at TyTy's stat sheet and tell me what you see there and is that just kind of the efficient game you expect from him?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yep. That's who he is. He's a terrific player. You know what else he is? A good defender. He's a good rebounder, and he's comfortable in his own skin.

Q. Is Dontaie injured or something else going on there?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, he hurt himself in practice. I went to stick Lance in and Lance said, Coach, I'm not feeling right. You know, I'm not loose or whatever. I'm fine with it.

I mean, because I was going to Lance and said let Daimion play.

So that's what happened. And I asked Dontaie before the game, how are you feeling? Eh, I'm a little shaky.

Q. Cal, this is two straight really, really good performances for you guys coming on not necessarily a short week, but short notice on the opponent and having to scramble on who you're playing. Is there something about that team that when it's a challenge like this maybe they respond?

JOHN CALIPARI: I've got a very, very smart basketball team. And this is crazy, I've got some older guys that understand how to be engaged, how to be laser focused. They know because they play. I got some young guys that are still learning, but I got a veteran group.

Q. I wanted to ask about the tornado relief. I think they said 4.6 million, and I wondered what you thought when the governor was introduced at halftime. There were boos, audible boos. What do you think of that?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, because you're telling me, Jerry, there may have been six people booing and you'll say there were boos. I will tell you that I don't -- that doesn't bother me. It's all what our government, our state government is doing to help our people.

We raised 4.7 million. I think they gave 100,000 to the game, to the American Red Cross, and so now the whole point is, Where are we putting this money? We got to get money in people's pockets, like money, money, but we're going to have to do something about housing. It's got to be long-term. How are we rebuilding downtowns?

You know, we went down and, again, we did some shoots, which are immediate stuff. We raised \$5 million, so now it becomes a chore of the government, and it's got to be public, private, there is no question.

But today -- and let me thank all the fans. I know the fans know it wasn't our fault that we had to play Western. I'm so happy for Western and Rick that they were able to join us in this, and then have people see a good game. Like we played well. That's -- we are -- it's not that they didn't -- they beat Louisville by ten; could have been more. They beat Mississippi.

They played whether it was Memphis on the road -- this team, his team is good. That's an NCAA tournament team. They'll be in their league championship race and the tournament championship race, and we beat them pretty good.

But I will tell you that, you know, all of it from our are governor to our legislature, it's all hands on deck. How about this? Federal government, FEMA, let's go. It's got to happen now.

I will go back to Mayfield, the Dawson Springs. I talked to the high school coach. He's bringing up his team to watch us practice. I mean, if they call me to come down, I will be down first thing I can be there.

If there is any way any of us, and I know that's all of our coaches. That's Mitch. What Mitch did today to say we're giving money to this, that's a big deal, and just appreciate what he's doing.

Q. You talk a lot about not letting go of the rope over the years. Both these games this week it was looking like it is going to get close at halftime and then your guys turned it into a blowout after that. What does that say about this team's progression?

JOHN CALIPARI: I think conditioning-wise that the other guys know, Holy cow, these guys don't stop.

Again, free throws. I'm going to say it again: They shot more than us. They did. But I'm telling you, those floaters, and you saw them, the inside out stuff, Oscar next to the basket, the one good thing is we ended up shooting -- does that say 56%? I can't see it.

But the game doesn't stop. Here we come. We are, pressing, we're running, it doesn't stop, and that's the way we want the game. Now, we're going to be playing teams that are going to try to shorten the game, so I got to figure out ways when they're trying to throw 15, 20 passes before they play, what are we going to do? How do we say, You're not playing that way.

Well, I've coached teams and had to do different things like that and I got some time over Christmas that I'll look at some things, if they're trying to hold it, what are we going to do, how are we going to play.

But I'm happy that these guys get to go home for Christmas. And again, I'll say it: If anybody wants to know about Ohio State and how they play, I watched about five, six hours. If you want to know about Louisville and how they play, I watched about five, six hours of that tape.

So you're right, it was a quick turn to play North Carolina and this team. Tells you really sharp, smart players who are engaged and really focused on how do we got to do this to win.