

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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Coach John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky 107, Tennessee 79

Q. I know you spent some time with Joe earlier this week. When you got up today and learned the news, when did you decide to put in the little touches to honor him that you had today, the rolled-up program and the 1-3-1 out there?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, when I went to see him, he was really lucid. He was struggling to speak, but he knew what I was saying, and so I knew it wasn't going to be a month, but I never thought it would -- and I got a call from his family last night, and they told me, Mike told me that it's near. Then when I woke up this morning, I got another call that he had passed.

Right then, I was like, geez, I should have prepared, but do you prepare the 1-3-1 before something happens? I don't like that karma. So I waited and it was after the shootaround that we had this morning, but I was going to do it knowing they'd probably score a basket, but so what. On senior night we put in every senior, don't care. How long they can play, that's what we do. This was a celebration for Coach Hall, the rolled-up program which I will bring out to every game this year to finish it out.

I loved the video. You know, what -- the greatest thing in all this, he knew what people thought and how much he was appreciated and beloved before he passed. He knew. Our fans have been so great to him.

All I can tell you is he's a mentor and a friend to me over my 13 years -- he had a radio show, and his radio show -- he's a former coach, so he's evaluating stuff as a coach. How about this one: He was in my practices four days a week, so he knew what we were doing. On a radio show, a coach with another coach, and his support and what he did to explain what we were doing, there's no question it helped. No question.

I know going to breakfast with him at Wheeler's and lunch with him at the Methodist church and making him pay and him -- every time -- I had to pay -- what? I'm just going to

miss him.

I'll say this: To the very end, he smiled. He smiled. 93 good years. That's all I can say.

Q. It's been a long time, almost two years, since you guys got to experience an environment like this and a big game in Rupp Arena. How did that feel, especially with the way you guys played?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I come back to last year was a throw-away year. You can be mad, what are you talking about. You think about what it was, I feel so bad for the kids, that they could not experience what Kentucky basketball was about. We still coached them and finished 8-8 in the league, were what we wanted to be, but we never got any advantage here. None. It was playing like we were playing pickup. I watched some West Coast games, and they brought back some bad memories when I saw no one in the stands.

This is who we are. This is how we coach. This is us. Last year was a throw-away. Again, some people jumped on it, and I'm fine with that. But this, this is what it's about, and I want these kids to experience this. That's why you come here. Our fans are the biggest -- now, some people try to steer the fans, but at the end of the day they're Kentucky basketball fans. You're not going to turn them off.

Q. Were you aware of Joe B.'s feelings for Tennessee, and what do you think he would think about this win today?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, just so you know, Eric Lindsey's feelings for Tennessee, I don't know if they're worse than Coach Hall's, but he was saying, you have to win this. Like for me, that's the -- and I'm like, why? Again, it's hard for me because Rick Barnes and I are so close. But it was a game we wanted to win, and it's a ranked opponent.

Now, okay, as you form your opinion, is it your opinion or your hope about what we are or what we're not. This team, and I told them, we've got a ways to go, but this was a step -- and look, I thought Tennessee played well offensively. They did some good stuff. Scored a lot of points. Some of

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them at the end, but don't even take that. They still scored more than they had against other teams in our league.

But we were so good offensively passing it, extra plays, they stretched out their defense, and we're a driving, shoot, floater kind of team. That's what we are. And it kind of worked in our favor.

Q. I was going to ask you about that because of the last points you made off Tennessee's defense, it was really highly rated, and you guys really got off to a good start shooting. Is there a momentum thing with that, or what do you think is going on? Like TyTy made his first shot in several straight games.

JOHN CALIPARI: I don't know. We're trying to -- when we're playing, I literally did not look at the score until I walked off the court at halftime. I knew we were playing well. I didn't need to look up. Called the last time-out just based on time, and then when we got it to whatever it was, 20 in the second half, I looked up.

I'm more concerned with how we play. I'm trying not to make this game to game. If you do that, you torture yourself and your team. Are we getting better? Our history is that our teams play better at the end of the year. That's the history. And so is this team getting better? Are individual players getting better? That's my focus.

Winning will take care of itself. We've got three road games. It'll be hard to win any of them. So? What if we really play well and you get beat? You've got to move on.

Proud of the guys, though.

Q. Tennessee has come down here the past few times and beaten you on your home floor and three out of the last four times. To beat your rival across the border in this type of fashion today, what does it mean to your team?

JOHN CALIPARI: Have they beat us three of the last four in Rupp?

Q. Yes.

JOHN CALIPARI: What have we done up there? Have we done okay up there? What's our record up there? Someone tell me. I don't know. I don't keep track. What's our record in their building?

Q. You won last year.

JOHN CALIPARI: Great, so what is it, 1-10? I mean, I don't know. But they play well here. I'm glad we won the

game. Like I said, Rick and I -- I was calling him for advice a month ago, getting a scout from him. He and I talk throughout the year. He's a great coach. He's got those kids playing.

We were really good. I think he thought they weren't as good as they should have been playing. I don't know that. He's the coach of his team. But I told him, we don't play much better than we just played.

Q. Back to the 1-3-1, how much do you think you've used that in 13 years, and why do you identify that so strongly with Coach Hall?

JOHN CALIPARI: I've never used it. Well, Seth Greenberg tried to talk me into using it, and we would spend hours on the phone, and then I wouldn't use it. So I've never used it as far as I can remember.

But Coach Hall put that defense in, and it became one of his staples to try to change up the game. He used it when he coached in FIBA basketball. He put it in with different teams. I swear to you, he hadn't been in our gym in the last maybe two years, but there's not a time that he didn't come in saying, I'm telling you, I can put it in in one day. He said, I coached my granddaughter's sixth grade team and put it in, and we went on a win streak. He told me that, and I laughed.

But that's why I did it, and that's why I was going to -- I just didn't want to give everybody the -- we're going to do it, and then all of a sudden they come in and throw two dunks in. So let's go, and I told the kids, if they throw it to the corner or middle, go man-to-man.

Q. Do you feel vindicated from the basketball biddies of us who have advocated you need to take more threes and be more up into the three-point game where you score 107 and only take 18 threes?

JOHN CALIPARI: I'm not going to argue with people. They have their own opinions. I'll let them be wrong. But here's what I'd say to everybody listening: I have this team every day. I'm in the gym every day. You've never been in the gym. I don't know how you can tell me exactly how you think a team can play or a player. You've got to see them every day.

Now, people have opinions, and it's fantasy basketball, it's the day and age, and I'm fine. But I'm not saying -- I've had a little bit of success doing this a certain way. I mean, I'm not saying it's the most successful, but it's been pretty successful. Not only here but at other places. I don't like living and dying with the three. I just don't. I like to be -- if we make a bunch of them, we win big. If we don't, we win

by eight. So that you can keep going and keep building.

Q. What stands out offensively about this game to you?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, they spread the defense, and we shot lay-ups. That's why the percentage was what it was.

Q. How much did tonight or today reinforce what Sahvir does for you guys?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, let me say this: Davion played good again. Now you've got four guards and you're trying to split up time, and I'm also trying to get Bryson there. Now I've got people saying let's play four 5'7" guards; we can do that. We're playing Winchester High School next week. I'm telling you we can play with -- we've got four guards, and I've got to figure out how to keep them getting better, bought into what we're doing.

I thought Davion was great today. Great. Great. I thought Sahvir tried to do a little too much at times, but he's 8 for 10 shooting the ball. You know, he shoots and makes shots, and you've got to play him. We're a little different team.

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