

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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Coach John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky 78, Florida 57

Q. The play with Tyty's lower leg and also the one in the second half with Lance and the Florida guy went down, how did you see those two plays?

JOHN CALIPARI: I didn't. I'll watch them on tape. When I see them on tape, I'll comment to the league about them. If I think they were obvious, they've got to explain why they weren't called.

Q. I wonder too, late in the first half you kind of went big with Oscar and Lance together. How much do you think that maybe changed the tone of the game?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, it did change the tone. Lance was the reason we had a gap. You know, and I said after, he's building his own confidence. He knows what he is. He's not listening to people tell him eighth grade basketball scoring. He's not listening to that.

He's doing what he has to, and he protected Keion. Keion didn't play great today. Keion has played out of his mind. Well, he struggled. He's not a machine, he's not a computer. It's not video games. Lance went in and covered for him.

I gave Bryce a little bit of a run, but when I put Lance in, Lance just made the statement loud and clear, you'd better keep playing me. So that's the only reason I didn't play Bryce more is how well Lance played.

But then Oscar does what he does, and I thought that Sahvir ran a great game, just ran us in the second half. It was great.

One point, one of the other players -- we broke a huddle, and I think it was Kellan said to him, listen, don't foul, because with you in the game, we're different. You make us run, so don't foul. And it's true. Like you could say it was just Lance, but he was out with two fouls and they were both fouls. He fouled both times.

Q. I was going to ask about Lance. I wonder if every team needs a Lance, what he brings beyond the box score.

JOHN CALIPARI: You know what I told him after, what's great, that shows you it's not eighth grade basketball, he shot an airball from the free-throw line, and you know what the fans were doing? "We want Lance," "we want Lance." It just tells you if you'll fight and complete and not be timid, just play aggressively, everybody loves it.

It's like I kept telling Sahvir, Sahvir, you have an impact on the game when you don't score, but it kills you when you don't. The minute you don't care about scoring, you're going to score, which he did today.

You know, it's interesting what we're seeing, Davion stepping in, doing what he's doing. We had time-outs and played a lot of people in the first half. In the second half you're trying to win the game. Again, the fans are loving on these guys, and that's why I keep coming back to.

You're talking down on the kids or the program. When you're talking down, you're yelling too much, or what about this, what about that, but I don't get it. But that's why I say we've got the greatest fans who when they recognize that stuff, no eyeballs or no ears from me. No eyeballs or no ears from our true fans, the Big Blue Nation.

These kids -- how about today, and I didn't know until this morning, that we were going to have four people from Mayfield come in. How about that? The team was like touched by it. Like they remember -- I said, where were we when it happened? We were at Notre Dame, Coach, and we went to the Grotto and we were praying -- I said, you prayed for four of these guys, and you know what, one of them was in the candle factory.

I come back to, please, everyone, do not forget about west Kentucky. We should be able to do this and do this rather quickly because we're not talking 400,000 people affected. It's a small number. Talking when we were up there to different legislators and the governor, I mean, they're on it. We've just got to keep moving.

Q. I don't mean to belabor the point, but on Tyty, it

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sounds like when you say you were laughing back there and the day-to-day, you're feeling pretty good that it's not a major --

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, there was an X-ray, so -- you know, yeah, so if that were -- it looked like there's something there, I'd be like, wow.

Now, he still may be out a week or two, who knows. Could be a muscle, it could be something that separated, because he got hit hard. It's kind of like the guy that bum-rushed our huddle. I mean, the game, it is -- but you know what was great, the other players at Florida came right up to me and said, Coach, we're all good. I said, Thank you, we are, too. Our team huddled and said, we're not buying into that. We're not. That's not who we are. We're worried about winning the game.

So probably it was good that it happened. Not that he got hurt but good that that kind of scrum and then our response to it. Like Lance responded great. He just laughed.

Q. It seemed like in the second half you just kind of kept feeding it to Oscar and letting him do his thing. Is it hard to come up with different ways to describe how good he's been for you?

JOHN CALIPARI: He's been a beast. The only thing, it's kind of like Sahvir, where when he focuses on one area, Oscar's thing, he started to get where he's trying to score. Like how does a kid make 85 shots in five minutes and then miss them in the game or miss free throws when he'll make 15, 18 in a row? Then it becomes you're trying to add points in your head, and you know how I know that affects it? Because I did that. Oh, yeah, you're counting points. I know what I had, and if I make these two, and then if I make -- well, then you don't make them. You've got to look at the stat sheet when the game is over.

So with him, just play, man. Just play.

Q. I was wondering, with Oscar, does he ever have a bad day? Do you ever have to tell him about anything?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, the people that are close to him said there were -- at a point in time that the kid was down and this, that and the other, but since he's been here, this kid got a smile on his face. He's starting -- like he's a funny kid. When he doesn't want to concentrate or he doesn't have the mental discipline, he just -- well, I don't understand the language. It's all BS. He understands everything. And if you watch him now, he doesn't break down on plays -- he knows what he's doing unless he

becomes mentally undisciplined and he starts to roam with his mind.

Like I said, I told him after, this is high-level basketball here. This isn't eighth grade. You can't be listening to eighth grade coaches telling you you've got to get points. Just what's your role on this team, I'm going to do it, and the biggest thing I'm going to do is fight and battle and compete and talk and do what I'm supposed to for this team. And then the team is going to do some stuff for me that gives me easy baskets.

Q. Is Kellan Grady one of the better shooters you've had, and what does having him do for the offense?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, he had some -- going back, Doron Lamb was a really -- like he'd go get 25 in a minute if you left him open, and I've had Devin Booker, he's not too bad. But we also had Aaron Harrison, who would knock down shots. I'm leaving guys out, Malik Monk. Come on, we've had a bunch here.

But what I like is I had to take him out because he missed four in a row. I had to. But his job was to keep shooting.

At the end of the half I got upset because Tyty was open in the corner and Oscar was open and he shot two balls. What are you doing? And then they got a lay-up. Well, you told me to shoot it. Not if guys are wide open.

Then he made his last shot, because I mentioned after the game, couldn't make a shot, and then somebody said, well, you know, he made four. He made three to start the game. I said, oh, I forgot, and they all laughed.

Q. I wonder with Tyty, hopefully not serious, as you say, but you've had several guys get hurt. Are you starting to feel star crossed at all? What's going on?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I talked to the guys after. You guys know my -- and I've talked about this, fresh minds and fresh legs at the end of the year, that's the most important thing. We went in this practice, we had a couple pro scouts come in, and I said, look, I'm going to go 5-on-5 for about 10 minutes, and that will be about it. I told the players before, the guys that need that are Bryce and Daimion. They need us to scrimmage some.

The problem is we've got guys that are in wars every time they play, and they don't need to be scrimmaging with 21 days left in the regular season.

So we did a 5-on-5 blackout drill. The third time up and down the floor, Oscar went down and grabbed his leg, and I went, what? And he ended up shaking it off and he was

okay. What do you think I did? We went 5-on-0, here we go.

So you can't -- our whole thing is being really focused, being fresh and ready to go, talking, accepting roles. Some guys are going to play better some days, some guys won't play as well some days. They're not machines. They're not robots. But we've got enough guys that can come in and do their thing.

Q. Kind of along those lines, I would think there's just a mental hurdle that you guys get over when you see a guy who's important to you, a teammate, go down the way Tyty did and it didn't look good in the moment. It's happened to you guys a few times. Are you happy with the way this team seems to be able to shake that off and keep going?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, and then if it was one more guy like it was at LSU and the way it was at Auburn, it makes it way harder. You know what I'm saying? We need those guys. But one, we can kind of cover for. We covered for Sahvir, we covered for Tyty. You can do it, but you can't cover for both of them.

Q. You always talk about everything points to March. All the things that have happened this year, the injuries, the games you've faced on the road, is that all in the long run really good preparation for when March gets here?

JOHN CALIPARI: What defense did Florida play today? Were you watching the game? They played a three two zone, which we haven't faced all year. Thank goodness we faced it, and I think our guys were confident in what we were doing, and they looked confident.

Q. I'm sure this doesn't necessarily matter to you that much, but in the National Player of the Year race you guys have officially launched Oscar's campaign with stuff like today. Are you all in on that, that he's the most impactful player in the country?

JOHN CALIPARI: I would say, but there may be some bias. Plays at Kentucky, no way. I'll vote for a yellow -- what do they call those, blue dogs? Yellow dogs? Before I'd vote for that. He may get some of that.

But the reality of it is if you watch and you see who he is, you've got to love the kid. He plays so hard. He never says a word about the officials. He smiles. He went to a great school and was working with some kids from the Congo. They said it was like ridiculous what it did for the kids and for him. He plays his heart out. He doesn't play great every night out, but he impacts every game.

So I would say there may be a couple players that are having more of an impact on games than him, but I'd have to see them, and I'd have to say over the long haul, he's doing things that haven't been done for 45 years. Yeah, but he's at Kentucky. I know. I get it.

We've had the Player of the Year here -- have we had a couple of those, I think? Two? So we'll see.

He's just got to finish. I told him, I'm trying to get him to stop worrying about offense so he'll score. Stop worrying about missing a shot and a free throw, stop worrying about missing one-footers. If you get 15 rebounds a game the rest of the way, you're going to be Player of the Year anyway, and if you stop worrying about offense, you'll score more. Wow, isn't it funny how that works?

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