

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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Coach John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky 90, Alabama 81

JOHN CALIPARI: Exhausted. You've got to get Kellan out. He's exhausted, and then he bangs a three. You want me to take him out? You want him out?

If anybody was close enough to the bench saying, he yells at everybody, yeah, I yell at everybody. The only person I can't yell at is the princess. She won't take it. She's like, no, not happening.

Q. Last week you said you could account for one of Tyty or Sahvir being out but not both of them. What does that say about this team's potential long-term?

JOHN CALIPARI: Like I told them after, we've got great depth. Just so you know, we had prepared for both Kellan, Davion to be point guards, because we've done it in practice. Davion more so than Kellan.

Now, the reason I started with Kellan on the baseline is I wanted Quinerly off the ball. I did not want him to guard the ball. I wanted somebody else to guard the ball. So we had two point guards, so whoever Quinerly was guarding we put in the grinder.

They made all those three early, and I kept telling the guys, look, you think they're going to make 30 today? Just play. We gave up offensive rebounds, we had late-shot threes, but we hung around.

This is a -- I keep saying, I like my team. There are good teams out there, but I'm taking this one.

Q. I'm not sure I've ever seen a guy who's as good a shooter as Kellan be so deferential at times. Was today particularly big for him because it put it squarely on his shoulders that you've got to shoot, you've got to score for us today?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, there's two things that happened today. We had to go through Oscar. We had to. I told Oscar, I don't care if the guy is 7'8", you've got to get

baskets and get fouled. The second thing I told the guys and I told them at the shootaround, you've got to make shots.

I jumped Jacob today at the shootaround. I normally don't do that at shootaround. Tom was there, so Tom knows what -- because he was like 2 for 11. You can't go through a shootaround and go 2 for 11 because now your mentality is you're not making shots in the game.

So after, he started making shots, and what did he do today? Made shots, made free throws, and I told him, you're going to have to make some jumpers. I didn't say threes. I didn't say threes. But if you have them, I was happy to see Keion make a three. But that's not who he is. He's a mid-range two-point shooter, and you know what, one of the best in the country.

What he did today, he started and got absolutely pushed -- it wasn't good. It wasn't good.

But the way he played in the second half, that's who he is. And that's all I'm going to accept.

Now, the greatest thing for him, he knows now I can start slow and I can sit down for a minute and get myself in the right frame of mind, and I keep telling these guys, you can't listen to the poison. You can't listen to it, wherever it's coming from. Just stay focused on each other.

Q. There were times early you said that you're established, people saw what we did at Kansas, people saw what we did to Tennessee here. Does this game move to the top of that list?

JOHN CALIPARI: I don't know. I mean, doing what we did at Kansas, that was done before at Kansas. I think it was 1942. So I would tell you what we did there was pretty big. What we did to Tennessee when you see how good they are, like they're really, really good, and what we did here -- but this game was doing a different thing. Now you're shorthanded, and guys have to step up.

I showed the guys a tape that was done of Nick Saban, Coach Saban, talking about being ready for your opportunity. Part of it was you're worried about the results.



You're results oriented. I need more shots, I need more minutes, I've got to get this, versus I'm going to be the best and train myself to be the best at the position I have. So when you do get a chance, you're ready to go.

Like we got some guys that haven't played. I thought Davion did good again. He did. Or Daimion, I mean, did good again. I'm not afraid to play him.

I thought Lance did good when we had to put him at 4 because we were getting manhandled at that position. But those guys are ready to step in and help, and they were all happy after the game. The whole locker room, they were happy with each other.

Sahvir and Tyty, I thanked them because they couldn't play, and those two want to play. They may be out another couple games. I need them healthy before March. We don't need them to play hurt. If we can't win a game because they're not there, then we don't win the game. If this group chooses to play to win, we'll have a chance, but it's hard, and Alabama is a good team.

They made 14 threes and lost. I don't know if you just heard what I said. We have our guards out and we have seven turnovers.

Q. When you're at full strength you're pretty scary. Does this give you confidence that you can make a run, a deep run if you're shorthanded?

JOHN CALIPARI: Here's what I would say. Again, because I've done this a long time and I've been in a lot of these one-game-and-you're-out deals, if you're playing with a short roster, you've got to be really lucky, that you're not going to have guys in foul trouble, that you're not going to get somebody hurt.

But if you have a deep roster, even if you choose not to play them all but you know they're there, and what you're going to try to do with a deep roster is get everybody in in the first half and then shorten the rotation to win the game in the second half.

The more players on your roster that can help you, the more room for error. Stuff goes wrong and you're okay.

I've had both. I've had my one UMass team I played five guys 37 minutes each, and we were fine and we made it to the game against Kentucky who had 11 NBA players we had to go against, but that game in the semifinal.

But you can do it, but I'm saying, very dangerous. Dangerous if you're playing five, six guys.

Q. Can you say why you decided to keep Sahvir and Tyty on the sideline? Is it an injury, illness, something else?

JOHN CALIPARI: They're both injured. I mean, they're both injured. It's one of those -- we just don't need nagging, so if they've got to take another week off, take a week off.

Q. I wonder, too, there was a time where Jacob went down and was holding his face. With all of the nicks and knocks you guys have had, what goes through your mind when you see another guy down?

JOHN CALIPARI: He got hit in the face, it was a foul. That was what I thought. And then somebody said Pat and I went nose-to-nose. I like Pat; he's a good guy. He charged me, but I'm good.

Q. Who do you think turned the game around in the first half when you went 10 in a row? What do you think turned the team around?

JOHN CALIPARI: I thought Keion, his aggressive defense and rebounding changed the game for us at that point. Instead of them getting rebounds and baskets where they just drive and shoot a lay-up, all of a sudden the threes they were making which were guarded, they're not making now.

Then we offensively -- I kept telling the staff, stop talking about the offense, we're fine. We played the game a little different today. If you could imagine, we had two practices to put a game plan together that was different than we normally would play. We ground it out. That's how we played today. And still scored 91 points.

But I felt that's how we were going to have to play with a short roster.

Q. After games like this do you feel that your team is learning to play winning basketball on both ends?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yes. Yeah, well, we made two plays. We tried to post Oscar 12 feet off the block, and there was one other play that I said -- oh, Kellan in front of our bench like putting the ball down where they could get it. You just don't do those things. Those are not smart basketball plays. What if it was a four-point game? We could have lost the game. What if there were fouls that they would get with that, two shots?

But the way we played and used the clock and created shots -- look, and you can say what you want, well, you banked two in. Do you know how many shots are banked

in against us? Like it's incredible. Guys from half court bank them in. So when we banked one in, I said, finally we get one to bank in. But they're getting better. They're learning how to win. It's a good group -- I'm telling you, every day I go to practice I enjoy myself.

Q. You've mentioned on occasion that Kellan kind of played the role he had today during his time at Davidson. Is that kind of what you leaned on a little bit when he had to be that lead guard at times?

JOHN CALIPARI: I teased him and I said, you played point guard against us your freshman year at Davidson when we played you, I think, in San Antonio, and he said, a little bit, but my senior year I played point guard. I'm not sure he's telling me the truth, but I think he's the kind of guard we've had here, the Tyrese Maxey, the Immanuel Quickleys, the Shai Alexanders, Jamal Murrays, Brandon Knights, they're basketball players. They can play on the ball and off the ball.

What I kept saying, that's where the game is going. Harden now is in Philly; do you think that Tyrese is going to have the ball in his hands all the time? He's not. But you know what? He can play the other way. He'll go get 40 points because he can play off the ball because that's what he learned.

I'm not coming there unless the ball is in my hand the whole time. We don't play that. Learn to be a basketball player. Learn to play on the ball, off the ball, in pick-and-rolls, learn to lift and drive, made baskets late in the shot clock.

He's done good. I'm happy that he kind of -- wow, I didn't know he was that much at the three-point line. How about he gets two turnovers? What's wrong with this kid?

Q. You talked about how well your team focuses on the game plan and what you want done. Is this the best example yet of that, what they were able to do today?

JOHN CALIPARI: Not early. Not early. We went under some dribble handoffs. We had some miscommunication on simple dribble handoffs, like big-to-guard, things we didn't do, and all we said is you've got to settle in defensively.

I said, we're playing well offensively, we're playing well enough to win. But you can't just keep giving them open shots. It's their game. They took 40. I know there's people that want me to coach that way. I'm fine. Nate is an unbelievable coach, does a great job, has turned that thing into a monster. There's all kind of ways of doing this.

I've done this for a lot of years, and I've changed and tweaked and brought in the dribble drive and then talked positionless basketball and played three point guards different times and had some three-point shooting teams, but 30 percent of the shots will be threes for us. Sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less.

But when you look at Bill Self, pretty good coach. His numbers are about the same. 28, 30 percent. Wow, we should take 60 percent should be threes and play all guards -- come on, man, we're Kentucky. What are we playing for, Larry? We're playing for March, to put ourselves in a position to win national titles. That's what we do here.

Let me thank the fans. Wow! Unbelievable environment. When we were dying, they never started booing. They don't boo, they were cheering us on. When we made that run at the end of the half, the last four minutes, the way we guarded, they cheered on the guard, the rebound, how we defended. That's what our fans -- they know what to cheer. They know what to push the buttons. Greatest fans. I love these fans.

I'm telling you again, they'll go back and they'll watch this tape three times. I'll watch it once. You won't believe this, I'll watch the game being played. When I watch the tape, there's some things I'm trying to look at to make sure I was either right or wrong. There's some things I may have gotten on a player about; I want to make sure I'm right in what I did, and if I'm wrong, I apologize and I tell him, I was wrong, here's what happened in that play. They know. They don't have to get upset with me if I'm wrong; they know he's going to go see it on a tape and he'll.

But I know our fans are going to watch it three and four times. I say, have fun and cheer again and pause it. I wonder if this one goes in. You already watched it three times, you know it's going in.

But that's what makes this a unique place, the fans. And the fans I keep coming back to, they're not moved. This is about this program. When the next coach is here, they'll be about this program and about these kids. That's what these -- Coach Rupp started this. The rest of us rent the seat.

Again, let me thank the fans. Guys, I've got to go out and do this radio show. It's 9:00 at night. I'd like to get home tonight, see my wife. I've got some friends in. But I appreciate it. Thanks, guys.

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