

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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Coach John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky 83, Ole Miss 72

Q. How important was it to see Tyty go on that run in the first half where he scored seven straight and just have some shots fall?

JOHN CALIPARI: You guys know before he got hurt he was shooting 40 percent from the three and 54 from the field. That injury got him a little off kilter, and the same with Sahvir.

But I told the team after, it's nice that we're all back. You guys probably didn't see the tweak that I've been thinking about and went with a little bit, and I thought it helped us, and then just, like I said, holding guys accountable.

Today I thought Oscar got bullied. I did. And I was on him about it and holding him accountable.

Now, he gets 18 and 15, but he still got bullied. I'm asking -- just like I'm keeping Keion and telling him, I'm holding you to a high standard, I'm doing the same with all these kids.

Somebody else may say, well, it's only -- no, I'm doing it with every kid. Jacob, let's go. Played Daimion at 4 today. That's what I want to do.

Now it becomes, okay, get it done; you've got a guy there waiting to get his time, and I told Bryce today, I wanted to go Bryce, Daimion and Lance, because Lance deserves to play because he plays so smart. Today that kid was a little big for him, but he still did pretty good.

Q. Kind of on that note, when you have someone like Lance and some of these guys like Davion and Kellan that you can rely on to come through when you have someone like Oscar that's getting bullied, was that a conscious thing this year that you decided this team needed a little bit more of a veteran presence to go with the freshman stars that you have?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, we knew we had to change the

roster. We needed to change, and Tyty was a big part of that. It's somebody that we wanted, and then Kellan and Oscar who wanted to be here, and I had to convince Kellan a little bit and had to convince Sahvir a little bit, but I think, again, if you asked him, he wanted to be here.

So no. You still -- Jacob has transferred in, Davion transferred in. We've got an older team. I've coached older teams before. You won't believe this, but I have. It just hasn't been in the last 13 years because of the rule changes and the way everything was going.

They're not delusional. They know what they are. See, when you're 17 coming in, you think I'm this and this and that and that because I did it in AAU. Or here's a good one: I did it at the Nike camp; why can't I do it here.

These kids already went through everything. They're not delusional about anything. They know. They look at what's around them and say, my role -- kind of like Davion. Davion is Sixth Man of the Year right now. Again, how well has he played? I put him in again for defensive rebounding the last game or the last minutes of the game because I felt he needed to be in there.

But we've got a good group. I'll say this again: Good teams have really good players; great teams have great teammates. This is a bunch of good guys that cheer for each other, and they're there for each other.

Q. I guess the assumption would be it's maybe easier to coach an older team than a younger team, but are there any aspects about an older team that are actually harder to do than when you have a bunch of young guys?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I always tell you I'm taking talent. I've said that from day one. But here's the good news. This is a veteran talented team. If you can get both, that's what you want, and we have that.

I mean, everybody says the same thing, they watch us play: Man, they're fun to watch; man, they create for each other. We had 18 assists, eight turnovers. They create shots for each other. Every one of them is playing for each other. They cheer each other on. Bryce went crazy, the

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whole team went nuts for him. Daimion played well at Alabama; they gave him the Gatorade bath and you had the shower by Keion walking in after Kansas.

These kids are about each other.

Q. It's March, and you always say you're coaching for March, you want your teams to be peaking. We haven't heard the landing the plane analogy yet this year. How is the runway looking for this team?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, let me tell you what I did yesterday. I went to -- and we did loose ball drills. People were in the gym now, we had the reserve -- who was in there, the reserve group? Who was in our gym yesterday? You had the JMI team, the donors were in there, we had 16 donors, and we did a loose ball drill because again Arkansas, we refused to dive on the floor. So we did a loose ball drill.

Problem was Sahvir hurt his wrist (chuckles). But to start the game, did you see Keion dive on that and tip it forward and us get an and-one or two free throws and I go crazy? Because we're emphasizing stuff and I want them to be locked in. I don't like doing loose ball drills. I don't like doing body-to-body this time of the year.

But this team needed it, and we did it, and thank goodness. I even said, Why did you do the drill, Sahvir? You know you have a wrist. He put his wrist underneath him to stop his fall.

Q. Does it concern you at all that you have a game where Oscar gets bullied? Is that just a credit to the other player or lack of focus or something on Oscar?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, the guy was really leveraging him. That kid is really good, by the way. Brooks is a good player.

But when Oscar caught it tight, he scored. When Oscar caught it out, I said, don't throw it to him. If that guy pushes him out, then he's not getting the ball, and we still threw it to him a couple times. But when he gets it tight with a good angle, it's a basket.

Again, you've got 18 and 15, and we're looking like what, come on, you're better than that. What are we, 30 and 20? We're all losing our minds. The main one is me.

Q. Chin said yesterday that the pattern this year is guys step up; when the opportunity arises, they do it. How important are Oscar and Sahvir to have it revolve around them?

JOHN CALIPARI: That's like having a middle linebacker on defense and an unbelievable quarterback on offense. That's what that's like.

Like I say, Sahvir, of all the point guards who are going for the Cousy Award, I need to see one that has a bigger impact on the game than him, both defensively and offensively. Creating shots, playing with speed, the pace of the game is what he dictates, smart. But then disruptive defensively.

You say, well, he's small. Yeah, but how disruptive -- they were pushing off to get it up the court. So I'm proud of him.

It's just good that we got through the injuries. It hurt us last game. We were a little bit out of sync last game.

I felt this game we looked a little more in sync.

Q. Obviously the injuries might have kind of played a role in it, but defensively you guys have allowed about 10 more points on average than the first 25 games. Is there anything you're seeing outside of the injuries that Ole Miss shot 50 percent tonight?

JOHN CALIPARI: Beat us on the dribble, and we were spread out all over the place. I mean, they shot 50 percent against us. Now, we shot 60 against them, but they shot 50 percent against us, and that's not who we are. The whole time I was saying, you've just got to guard. Then they made a couple threes to fight.

Now, I've watched their tapes, and I don't usually speak to the other coach, but I said, I was in the position last year that you were in, Kermit. You've done a way better job than I did. And you kept your team fighting, and you got them to accept roles. They got two major injuries or they're in the middle of our league or higher.

I think he's done a great job. The games -- they don't quit. The only team that beat them pretty good was A&M. Other than that, it's a six-point game with a few minutes to go every game they play.

Q. At this time of year, especially with a team that's played as well as yours has, is there any kind of danger or concern with kind of just looking ahead and saying, let's just get to the tournament?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I won't let them do that. We could go to Florida and get beat, but it won't be because we're overlooking them. We know how good they are, and it's on the road, and you know what it's going to be: A nuthouse, because that's what happens every time we come in town.

Mike has done a great job with his team. They beat Auburn. You know, they had Arkansas beat. They did.

We know how good they are.

I again am laughing. This is the best league in the country. Why aren't we talking eight teams of ours in? What?

What I hope is they separate the top four of us and we're all in the Final Four. My guess is they'll put us and another team from our league in the same region. They'll put two of us and two of them so only two of you can advance. But if we're all spread out, we could have four teams in.

Why don't we get eight teams in? Why are we not talking about other teams that are in the middle of the pack in our league?

I think we should be getting eight teams in. I've said it, what the goal should be is eight.

Q. You've prepared your team to be ready in March. Did you see any kind of glimpses about the way that you would like to play at this stage of the season?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, we played faster. That's what I wanted us to do, and that's what we talked about, and we ground it out when we needed to. We had two plays that I went to the grind-out offense, and Kellan got a three-foot, four-foot floater, missed it. Keion got a 15-footer on the baseline, his shot, and missed it. But we did everything right. We grinded. We used clock. We just missed those shots.

Q. Something I haven't heard you talk about for a while is the fact you say if you don't have a post presence your team is a fraud. Is Oscar the ultimate testimony to that this year?

JOHN CALIPARI: Did you ask me if we have a post presence?

Q. You said if you don't have one, your team is a fraud, and a lot of people say, well, things have changed, maybe you don't need a post presence, but I think Oscar kind of makes your point for you.

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I'm going to say the same thing. If you don't have a post presence, you're a fraud, and if you think you're going to march through the NCAA Tournament shooting 40 threes a game, good luck, because one of those games you're going to go 5 for 40 and you're going to lose by 20. In one of those games you may go 20 out of 40, 22, and be all ecstatic first round, but you've got to have someone that can get easy baskets. That's how you

shoot a high percentage.

Q. You went undefeated at home this year. Fans took a little while to get started, but at the end of the year they were as strong as ever. Just your general comments on the Rupp Arena crowd and what it's like to have them back again.

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, last year that was a knockoff year. I've said it before. You had no fans, you had nothing here.

I think what we've done over our time here kind of tells you what we are and what we're about. Our fans, I've said it all along, are the biggest part of what happens here. It's what sets us apart.

We go on the road, they're there. We go to North Dakota, they're there. They're everywhere.

You go to the conference tournament and a team loses and the fans want to sell their tickets, they say, I'm selling tickets to anybody but Kentucky fans. Won't sell them to our fans, so our fans got to go in orange and red and -- yeah, I'm not -- and they've got their Kentucky stuff on underneath.

Our fans are the biggest piece of this, and they pick these kids up. They understand, the ones that have really been following, it's been consistent over 13 years how we play. It's been consistent. It doesn't mean we win every game, but it's been consistent about this is who we are and how we try to play toward March. This team is no different.

Proud of our fans, proud to be working here, excited that -- for these players.

You know, I don't even want to hear about from one year to the next. That was a COVID year. There were many of us that it was a knockoff year. It was nothing. Get rid of it.

So for someone to say, wow, they went from this year to this, it was the biggest turnaround, stop. I don't want to hear that. That was a nothing burger, what we had to go through last year.

These kids, they were cheated. They didn't get the Kentucky experience. They didn't.

You know, it's great Davion could come back and Keion could feel it again and Lance and Jacob could feel it. This is what it is to be playing here at Kentucky.

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