

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Thursday, November 3, 2022

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky - 111, Kentucky State - 53

JOHN CALIPARI: Yes?

Q. The situation with Daimion, how do you handle that with a player, with the team and perspective? Because you still had to play a game tonight even with all that's going on.

JOHN CALIPARI: So, you know, it kind of played out, mom was in Texas, hadn't heard from her husband. Can you go check. And then Daimion's at the office. Mom's in Texas. Got to talk to both. Then I have to go back and tell the team. I had staff up at the apartment.

And, you know, I was good until I walked in the room and saw their faces. And you're trying to stay strong for them. But it took me some time to get composed. And the message, you know, it wasn't what Ben did and it's not something that someone did to Ben. God took him. The night before he was with Daimion. They were in the gym for an hour and a half. When he got back to the apartment he called his wife. They were on the phone for 20 minutes. When he hung up the phone some time shortly thereafter he passed away.

Now, for the team, that first night we had I think six guys stayed at my house and then his mother and sister and auntie came in and cousins. And then we had -- they stayed at the house.

And, you know, Ellen and I, you just, for the players, they got to be there for each other. And spending time with Daimion. And, you know, he's very quiet. And I told him, Grieving and depression, you're going to get in a dark place. And my only thing to him was, If all you're doing is sleeping and looking at that phone, you're in that dark place. And if you need to talk to players, talk to your teammates. Even if you're crying, you got to talk to somebody.

And the other thing is you got to exercise or do something to get you going. Because, you know, he's in Texas right

now looking after his mom and his sister and his brother. But it was a very -- we didn't practice that day.

Yesterday I was into it, but it just, you know, I went back and the team yesterday all came to the house to be with his family. We ate and that.

But it hits because he was here. And then it was, you know, but I feel for Daimion. I worry about him. We had psychologists there for the team if they needed it. And they got cards if they want to do something.

I had a couple guys stay at the house last night again. But the only thing I said to Kim and Daimion is, God is good. His last hours were with his son who he loved and was very, very close to. And he was on the phone with his wife.

But there's nothing you can really say in these situations. I just was listening and there for them and how can we help, what can we do.

But I told him, You know, you take what you need to take, how much time you need to take. We'll hold the fort down for you.

Q. It's hard talking about basketball after that, but you guys did play a game tonight and played without lot of guys, including Daimion. How did you think Cason at point guard did? Seemed like he handled you guys pretty well. He's obviously -- I'm sure some of that's weighing on him as I know he's cousins --

JOHN CALIPARI: It's his cousin. You know, he's a little beat up. C.J.'s still a little beat up. But what I liked was we opened up the court a little bit different. You learned a little bit playing Missouri. This is a new team. So you try certain things. We've already thrown out two or three things we were running that we won't run.

But Kentucky State came in and physically did their thing. But we made shots today. So you make shots it all looks different.

Ugonna gets 11 rebounds.

Lance gets nine rebounds. I told him he could have gotten

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a few more. But he's 4-7 from the line. I'll live with that all day.

I thought Chris was better today.

Antonio made shots today.

We just, you know, we're going to be a team, for the time being, that you got to make some jump shots. You're going to have to. And we have the kind of team that can.

I wanted to do some things with Jacob to make him get near that basket and do some things physically. I thought he did okay.

I even told Coach after, Coach Jackson, I just said, Look, we shot the ball well today. We didn't last game. We did this game.

Q. Back to Daimion's situation for a minute. In your career have you had to deal with something similar to this or exactly like this?

JOHN CALIPARI: I had to, Marcus Camby. Most of you are not old enough, I'm looking around the room. Marcus Camby, we were at St. Bonaventure and I'm in the locker room and he passes out and he's on the floor unconscious in the hallway and Dante Bright, I can still remember, runs into me and says, Coach, Marcus fell out. Marcus fell out. And I ran out and literally he was out cold.

I didn't coach the game. I went to the hospital with the kid. I was so concerned. I thought he was going to pass away.

So I can still remember the feeling being in the waiting room, pacing, praying. He ended up being okay. He had to stay in the hospital, try to figure out what it was. They never did.

It was hard coaching him the rest of the year because any time he went to grab his knee, You okay? You all right?

I mean, you know, at the end of the day I'm dealing with people's children. I had one of the parents call me from this team, and say, You look after my son, please. He's never dealt with anything like this. And he's one of the guys that stayed at the house. And he stayed again last night for the same reason.

So, you know, it puts things into the perspective it needs to be. And it's not fair. I told the team. Things aren't fair.

That man sold his business. He had a trucking business. He also drove. But he sold it so he could be here with his son. Think about that. Said, I can't leave it in anyone

else's hands so I'm going to sell the business.

And now he wasn't up here full-time, but he was in and out. And he happened to be in. And I always -- he would sit up in the upper deck. He would wave to me and sit up there and watch. The guys that were in the gym that night before saw him in there.

But it happened with Camby, that kind of way, which is, you just drop everything. It's, whatever's going on literally does not matter at that point.

I even asked the guys, Do you want to play this exhibition? I left it up to them. Because, you know, everybody grieves differently. And everybody handles what just happened differently. And a lot of it will be a couple days from now. That there may be some stuff we got to deal with.

Q. Anything that Ugonna has done in these two games has it maybe changed your perception of what he might be able to wring bring to the team this season?

JOHN CALIPARI: The biggest thing we're probably, probably not as good without Oscar. (Smiling.)

But I think we've got to space the court. And some of the stuff that I put in, I took out after Missouri Western. I said, We're not doing this and we're not doing that.

So you could see we played a little bit different today. I got a really smart team. I'll tell you who is really smart too is Ugonna. You only got to tell him one time.

So, yeah, we're -- and then defensively we just got to keep figuring out -- the biggest thing happened today, every time we played behind the post they scored. Every time. So what do you think we're going to work on the next two days?

You play -- like I took guys out today. You played behind the post. He scored, you're out. Why did you play behind? Well I was, you know. It's just harder to be that way. Harder to play that way. It's easier to play behind.

So the other thing is, we got to do something with the zone. Now we worked on it, but not -- and we called Coach Jackson and said, Would you play us some zone. He said, I don't have a zone in. I said Geez, you sound like me.

So we haven't really -- now would you play us zone with the way we shoot? Maybe. Maybe trying to change up a game. We got to be prepared for it.

I just told these guys, Today, tomorrow and Saturday are big days for us. Forget about that we played tonight.

Tomorrow's practice and Saturday's practice have to be good days for us.

Q. You talked about the absence of Oscar. Obviously quick turnaround for you guys. Do you anticipate him being able to go on Monday and how much of it is a duality of trying to get the wins, but also making sure you guys are good down the stretch?

JOHN CALIPARI: You know what, I would be stunned if he played Monday. I would be somewhat surprised if he played Friday. Do we play Monday, Friday? Is that what it is? I would be somewhat surprised.

But it's mainly a pain threshold. And he's just not normal. If he wanted to play Monday I probably wouldn't let him. He needs a few more days. If he wants to play Friday I'm going to have to work him out myself and see. And if I did, he would probably play 10 or 15 minutes, just to get his legs under him.

And then Sahvir, I don't know. I mean, he was there and he's walking around. You can't just say, Well I'll play Monday. You got to practice to make sure you can do this.

But I saw some stuff today. And he and I talked on the bench. And there was some things I said to him. What do you think?

And we did some stuff today on the fly with C.J. C.J. was pretty good in pick-and-roll, wasn't he? Again, you want to know what you find out is you play games like this and you see certain guys in a pick-and-roll are better. And the main thing with him was his pace. He wasn't running downhill, I'm going, throw it. He was coming off and, you know, he was good.

Antonio made shots he was good.

I thought Adou did some good stuff.

Chris was way better.

Q. How difficult is it to get guys in the roles that you think they're going to be in when you have the National Player of the Year out for a month and all-SEC point guard kind of in and out for the last few weeks?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, that's why I made the statement I made publicly about now with all what's just happening, this is going to take a little time. And to think you can play with two first team all-conference players out and just pound people, it's not happening.

I told the staff, we got to worry about putting ourselves in

the best position with this group.

The other side that happens is, they're trying to find themselves. My big message to them, Don't try to impress me. Try to impress your teammates. They know how we're coaching. Fall back on your training.

Not with the chair and the cone and the broom and the work out guy. The training that we've given you in how we're trying to play. Fall back on it. You know what we're asking you to do. Do those things.

If you can do more, we'll see. Like I didn't know C.J. was that good in pick-and-rolls. Anybody else know? Then you watch the game and you go, My, he's pretty good in pick-and-rolls.

I told 'em, The other thing is, if you're missing free throws do you expect to play the last five minutes of a close game? Now you don't, do you? Come on. Yeah, but so what, I miss 'em, we lose. No, that's not how it goes.

So, you know, how guys are playing, what they're putting out there for their teammates. And I said, Impress yourself and impress your teammates. Don't worry about me.

I got, you know, a couple guys worry too much about me. Like just do your thing.

Q. (Question about Antonio.)

JOHN CALIPARI: I like it. Here's the thing here. You know, there's an ego to starting. I'm a starter. I've said this before: Who finishes the game's probably more important than who starts the games. Because you can start a guy just so he feels good about himself and sub him three minutes in. But that last part of the game you're playing the guys that have, that have the grittiness to them, that mental toughness to them to play to win the game. And it's not playing just to play basketball.

That may be what this team is. I've had guys come off the bench and they're lottery picks. I've had guys come together as a team and cheer for each other. And no stats are really good, except analytically all their stats are really good. And they all get drafted and go on and we win.

But it's hard because, you know, people around them or what they're hearing is stats. How many points did you get? You know, you're in 6th and 7th grade, you're in high school you get your name in the paper because you scored the most points.

Here it really doesn't matter. You can average 10 or 9 or 8 and be a lottery pick, for God's sakes.

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But I like it. I like him off the bench. But how about if you had C.J. coming off the bench? I mean, it wouldn't matter, either one. And then there are times I want 'em both in. Why? They go zone. All right, you're both in. Now both of you just start jacking balls, here we go.

But again, we end up with 10 turnovers. Six between Cason Antonio. Think about that. As fast as we're trying to play. So rebounded better, didn't give up as many offensive rebounds. But we got more than they got. And again that's without Oscar.

What do you think of Ugonna? Pretty impressive. And somebody we weren't sure. So I'm excited for him. He was scared to death. We sat him down and I just said, Kid, your self talk, you got to be positive. You got to be your biggest cheerleader. And if you got negative self talk, you're going to, it's going to show in how you play.

Now he's smiling. And it was just, Smile, man, have fun. So he's a great kid. And smart.

Q. What have you liked about him in 35 minutes of playing time in these two games, probably more opportunity than he would have had otherwise, what have you liked about him from what you've seen?

JOHN CALIPARI: That has been an advantage for us to see. Even today without Sahvir now we got to see some stuff. We're just, what I think may happen is someone gets it going, he's going to play a little bit more than you. If he's -- you know, like he impacts the game in a different way than Lance impacts the game.

What Lance can do, I'll be honest, Ugonna is not very good at. But what Ugonna is really good at Lance isn't as good. But Lance got three blocks today. But this kid's blocking balls left and right. Rebounding in traffic. Lance had nine today too.

So one may play more than another in a certain game. And it's the same with some of our -- like Adou is showing some things now. Way better off the ball. He was used to having the ball. And soft cuts and, you know, defensively never being held to this standard of every minute you got to play. And now all of a sudden he's held to a high standard you see him going.

You see Chris. Well, what if he gets in and he's playing out of his mind? Chris may play less. What if Chris is diving, dunking, shooting, playing? Then he may play. You got to accept that when you're on this kind of team.

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