

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Monday, November 7, 2022

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky - 85, Howard - 63

Q. (Question about Daimion.)

JOHN CALIPARI: He's coming in this evening. He has an option. He can stay at my house or he can stay at the lodge with the guys. My guess is he'll be at the lodge with the guys and they will all greet him tonight. Now I didn't know they were doing this, but they had him on FaceTime prior to the game. That's why they were on the court all going crazy. This has been a rough deal. You know, every person grieves differently. Just and there's nothing you can say to change that grief. It's just we are here for you, we love you.

So but the funeral's this weekend, so he's going to have to go back this weekend. But I think getting in the gym, getting around the guys he'll start that climb back. But it's just, just awful. I say it again, it's nothing Ben did to himself and nothing that someone did to Ben. God just said, It's your time. And that can happen to any of us. But he was here with his son. He was on the phone with his wife. But that doesn't make it any easier for the family.

Q. I saw on social media last night that you had the guys at the house for dinner and a little walk through. Especially everything that's going on can you talk about how close this team is not just with you or not just with themselves but with you and your family?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I'm just trying to keep an eye on everybody because everybody will say they're all right, but I just want to make sure we're all together. They were at my house and then we went on the outdoor court and we walked through there.

And Ellen gets mad if I don't bring the guys over to the house. She's like, Where are the guys? She had brownies today. It was Cason's birthday today so he had brownies. Did not share them.

But this a unique and special group. And they're competing for minutes, but they're cheering for each other.

Q. Speaking of Cason, how did you think he ran the point tonight especially the two turnovers?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I thought he did good. He had a triple double. Like, you know, a couple more rebounds, come on, kid. He's a triple double. Who is the last guy to do a triple double for me? Who? Briscoe and Fox? And he's doing good. I mean the biggest thing is we're doing it without post presence right now. We're not able to get it in there like we would like to. But C.J., Antonio. I mean, I know ego, you want to start, but who cares? Antonio was unbelievable. He defended and he is trying. And I thought Chris was good, Adou was good. I mean they, Ugonna showed signs. He still, we're getting screened by his man and he's not vocal enough. But he's really good. I thought Lance was better. Lance has the minutes on the court, he's going to do stuff. I also think he and C.J. play together well. They play off of one another pretty good.

Q. Does Cason remind you of one of your great point guards in anything that he does? And have you built that rapport with him like you do with your point guards?

JOHN CALIPARI: He's a guard is what he is. And the best players I've had have been guards. They can play on the ball, they can play off the ball. But they're tough nails. He is tough. Now we got on him because he missed all those lefty layups. So he made one today and he looked right at me. And then he said, You know what, I think I'm just going to go dunk it. And I said, You can't dunk on a -- and he dunked it and looked over. He walks in the gym -- and if you remember, Jemarl Murray used to make me smile. He would go, Smile. This kid walks in, Where's your energy, coach? Energy.

And so he's fun to be around. He's a competitor. It's kind of like Shai where he says, I trust you. Tell me how you want me to play. I trust you. And he's special.

But with C.J., when you have three guys, C.J. Antonio and him on the floor together, you got three guys that can score the ball and shoot the ball and now you got to rebound with those guys. So now they got to figure out, you play that kind of unit, you got to rebound balls. But I thought we

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defended pretty good today. That's a good team. Howard will win their league I'll be stunned if they don't win their league. I watched tape and I was scared to death prior to this game. Like they're 6'-9", they're 6'-10", they're big, they can shoot T they took 48 threes in a scrimp they just had played. But we, you know, when you guard and then make baskets the other team's rim shrinks. Every time you make three, three, it puts more pressure on them to come down and score. And if you're really guarding it's even harder to make baskets. And then if you rebound misses and fly it kind of piles up.

So this was, to be honest, I didn't think we would have this kind of showing. Jacob had 11 rebounds. Double double. You know what I said? When you rebound like that and defend the way you defended, you can miss shots. He was 5-12. He missed a bunch of shots. Well I'll leave you in. As long as you rebound and defend.

So he was good today too.

Q. The last exhibition and tonight you only had eight available players. Scholarship players. But you still had great offensive performances. When you get the team all healthy and back together what's that going to mean for this offense?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well we're going to have a couple guys fighting for minutes because won't believe this, you know Oscar's playing. So that means those 28 to 30 minutes are coming from somewhere. Daimion comes back, let's just, even if it's 20, 25 minutes, it's coming from somewhere. So guys you start -- and I'm not going to play 11 guys. So like one of the things I'm trying to do is I'm holding guys to a high standard because they're going to be fighting for minutes. Most of it will come down to, are you breaking down defensively. Are you not rebounding balls. Then I got to play someone else. And there's two or three of you. So whoever's the best defender, the best rebounder, a guy that's out there and we click. And the greatest thing about this game and I believe next game is everybody's getting minutes to show what they are. And if there's any separation you'll see it. Ugonna, I mean come on, kid walks in and just starts blocking balls. So you think, okay, I can get a basket, I can get a basket. Then he walks in and he blocks how many blocks did he have? He had four blocks. That's big. Changes the game. We go down and break it, get a layup.

Q. On that note you talk about players that are going to be fighting for minutes. What does it mean to you when you got a guy like Ugonna it's going to be fighting for Oscar's minutes and every time he's doing something Oscar is just on the sideline and going crazy and rooting for him to do the best.

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I had Oscar coaching him on the bench and I had Sahvir coaching Antonio as a point guard. Because if Cason wasn't able to play it was going to be Antonio. And you saw today, I put him at point guard some. So I'm letting those two coaches -- as a matter of fact, Sahvir came up to me about a play, Why don't you run this. I said, Why don't you sit down. No, I didn't say that. I said, Fine.

Q. You touched on Sahvir there but with Cason playing like this does it make it a good probably to have two really good point guards or how do you go about managing those two their playing time?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well you can play together. But you also got C.J. and Antonio. What if a team went zone? I was ready to go back in with Antonio, but then Chris went in the middle of the zone and made baskets. And Chris is playing well. I mean they're all good problems, but it's, for us, that's my job to figure this out and make sure everybody's, you know, we're together. We're cheering for each other. I'm not, I mean I think part of the reason we're playing well is I'm playing eight guys. Nice little rotation. And you're getting in there and you can make a mistake and you stay. So the ideal rotation would be eight.

But we have 11.

Q. You talked about Chris there for a second. We saw him get on the ball for some on the floor for some balls tonight. Hustled well. You started him at the three. Seen him play some four. How much do you like his versatility even at such a young age?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well he is so conscientious and cares so much and he cares too much about me. Like I said, Don't try to impress me. Try to impress your teammates. But I'm proud of him because he's getting better. I coached him hard today. He kept leaving corners. If you've ever been in our practice there's two problems: One handed catches or rebounds. We run. And leaving a corner. We run. He and Adou left the corners. Just left. We've been doing this since Bahamas. We don't leave a ball side corner. And if a guy drives baseline, you may come, but you go back to your corner. I would rather give 'em a layup than that open three in that corner. And I would also hope somebody's going to block it. And it ain't going to be you. So get back out.

But they're learning. They're learning.

Q. Is anything about Antonio surprised you so far?

JOHN CALIPARI: He's a better defender than I thought.



He's a better defender than I thought. He just has a knack, like I tell him, if you have an inch, let it go. And he and C.J., C.J. was good again today. I mean you know what C.J. does? Makes all the right plays. My guess is, yeah, C.J. had no turnovers. And he played 20 minutes, no turnovers -- no total points 20. 36 minutes. No turnovers. That's him. You think about it. You got a guy that can make shots, make the right plays and doesn't turn it over.

Q. Philosophically speaking here why don't go ahead and play all 11 if all 11 are playing well?

JOHN CALIPARI: Just hard on all of 'em. You remember the year I did the platoons and we won every game and it was all -- yeah, for two years I couldn't recruit anybody. You want to go there and play 20 minutes? I'm going to start you and you're going to take all the shots and you have to go there. And I said, I did that one time in my career. And I had no choice. I had 10 guys. So if I felt we had 10, you know who -- that year who 11 and 12 were? Two good players that are still playing professionally. Oh, my gosh. Dominic and Derek. Some of you had no idea. Old people. But that's, those two were 11 and 12. And they're, you know, and they stayed and did their thing and playing professionally. Derek I think is in Spain now. He was in Italy. I was jealous. But he's in Spain. And he's making great money. Doing well.

Q. Tonight with this win, this is a 203-9 you are when holding opponents to 63 or under. Here in your Kentucky career. Are you happier about this --

JOHN CALIPARI: What is it?

Q. 203-9. Tonight. For holding opponents to 63 points or under.

JOHN CALIPARI: So we probably should try to get them under 63 or below?

Q. I'm just --

JOHN CALIPARI: And if you, 53, let's hold-em you know 63 we don't lose many, right? And then you saw we ground out at the end of the game. We haven't really done that much in practice. I put in some things yesterday just because I started to get worried, what if we need a three. What if we, you know, I'm waking up at 5 a.m. like, oh, my gosh, we're down three and the rent is due. I mean, what are we going to do here.

But, no, that's differentiator for my teams has always been that. But shot blocking has been a part of that. When we have great shot blocking teams, we're in the 30s. Just are.

Q. So then to be clear you're happier about the defense than the 95 points scored.

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I'm hasn't that we're shooting, making shots. How many did we take? 28? I today 'em, I said this is probably a team that's going to shoot 24, 25. Which is a four more, but I said, but if we really make 'em, we may shoot more. Because it's not -- you know people talk, just shoot threes. It's not that. It's make threes. Make threes. And if you can make 'em, because if you're taking 30 and you go 4-30, which can you do, you're losing. And so that's why I'm saying, this team though, got a lot of guys that can make shots. And like I said, we got some things we got to figure out, but they're good issues and I'm just going to keep coaching kids. I called Adou in the office I said, I'm holding to you a high standard. You do know you're going to be in a dog fight for minutes. So anything that I'm trying to do to help you so that you are in that fray for those minutes. And it may be some game to game stuff. Guy goes in, he's playing, look, he's going good, let him play today. We will see.

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