

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Wednesday, November 23, 2022

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky - 96, North Florida - 56

Q. Why the switch today?

JOHN CALIPARI: I didn't like how we started the last game. Just didn't like it. And I said let's let him come in and see if we start better or if we defend a little bit better.

But it doesn't matter. I mean, you're going to have four guards playing 25 minutes. Unless someone plays a lot a lot, it's what it is. I called 'em in and one thing I said to 'em, I had the four guard and Chris, and I said, I want to play Chris more, but you guys got to help me because right now, with Chris there, his mind's a little jumbled right now. He needs you to give him confidence. He needs you to be talking to him on the court. And then he's responsible for making easy plays, going and rebounding, flying up and down.

Biggest thing is defensively, both he and Adou, I told 'em both, I thought Adou did some good things. How about those blocks? Well, just stay in front of people. He's going to block it. He's got a knack for that. But they're getting beat on straight line drives. They're leaving their feet and here comes a guy.

The problem with that is you're going to get Oscar in foul trouble because you're not keeping that man in front of you. But want to play those guys. I thought Ugonna -- Lance was sick. Would have played if we needed him. So that's why we did what we did.

But we played, you know, we worked one day on what I would call a sequence. You fly up and down the court, you fly and it's not there. And let me just say, because as a coach, I talk about the sequence, which I've done, but I haven't, like I said, this is -- and I put the sequence on the board and I looked at one of the guys, and I said, Tell me what the sequence is. He didn't know, which tells you that's why we played a couple games where if it wasn't there, no one moved the ball, we held it, shot bad shots, shots that you can't rebound, quick threes that were contested.

So we're going to spend time really working on, when you play a good team, you're not just running them out of the gym, but you're going to fly to try. What happens next? If the ball moves, what's the last thing that happens with 10 seconds on the clock? How do you get a good shot now?

So we're working on it. Today, again, some execution breakdowns again. I mean, I said, Okay, we're going to run this. Do you know it? Two guys said no. We ran a play and the guy didn't go where he was supposed to. Another guy didn't cut off. We got work to do. But I like what I saw, assist to turnovers I like what I saw. Figuring out for the first time how we post Oscar, stuff that we're trying to do.

I liked Ugonna. But he gets tired. Chris got tired. I told 'em, Sub yourself. Don't stay in there and get beat on the dribble twice. Sub yourself.

Q. You mentioned lack of practice time as far as the team kind of being discombobulated. I guess what was different about pre-Bahamas practices to --

JOHN CALIPARI: All that stuff we were doing, it was team camaraderie. So we were running two things. That was it. And everything was about, All right, let's get in shape. Let's fly up and down the court. Let's work on spacing.

But the execution, we didn't, none of the stuff that we're running now we really ran down there.

The Bahamas trip is to go play competition. Who will fight in those situations. Who is not afraid to make shots when the lights are on. And let's get together and have a ball and get to know one another. And that's what the Bahamas trip is.

But like I said, when we weren't together with Oscar and Sahvir and Daimion that's why I kept saying, it's going to take us a little time. I'm not happy that we lost two games. I want to win every game I coach, especially one -- I've talked to both Tom and Mark, we're friends, you know, and I knew it would have been hard for us to win.

But I thought we would battle and it would come down to,



to be truthful, an execution play that they would make that we couldn't make. But when it started the way it started and we couldn't make a shot, it got ugly.

But today, again, like, North Florida, they went to Duquesne and should have won the game. A floater at the buzzer, they got beat by one.

They went to Washington and played 'em to an 8-point game. Gonzaga got 'em pretty good and we got 'em pretty good. They beat South Carolina State. Their league is really good, but Matt is a terrific coach, plus he's from Pittsburgh. I don't know if you heard him say yinz. He said yinz like three teams and I said, You can't say that outside the city limits.

Q. Given what you just said there about not running a ton of stuff in the Bahamas and with the injuries that occurred, did you forecast any kind of the issues in terms of understanding what you guys wanted to run not being able to execute in certain game situations entering some of those bigger games you've already played?

JOHN CALIPARI: Again, here's what happens. You ask them the question and they can't answer it. That means, as a teacher, you haven't done your job. They need to be able to answer the question. I even put it on the board, and said, What is it? And one guy, but I stood in front of it. So the guy was trying to look around me so he could answer it.

So now we're talking about it every day. I'm asking 'em questions, What are we supposed to do? Because you think they know and when you think they know something, you're always wrong.

Now here's the other thing that's happening. When people are playing two- and three-man games and they bring people together, the same two guys on my team, when they're in those, get scored on. It might not be them. It'll be the other guy. Someone's getting scored on. So now we know. We know that getting beat on the bounce, if you want to play you can't just get beat on straight line drives where your man's driving down the lane or baseline. You can't.

If you want to play, especially in the high-level games, which our league, every game will be high level, and we still got a bunch left to play. But you have to play the kind of games we're playing to find out what we're going to have to work on.

It's hard when you're winning by 30 or 40, 20. It's hard because you get intoxicated, like, we'll be all right. Every

time we broke down against Michigan State and Gonzaga they scored. Every time. That's what good teams do. That's why you got to play a good team and let them do that so you can get with your team and show 'em on tape and say, You're not beating anybody that's good if we don't get this right.

Look, here's the biggest thing. I love this group. They're great teammates. There are still some guys unsure of themselves. Most of 'em have a ways to go. Some of 'em want to play a different way than the way this team needs them to play. I just got to demand, you're going to play it the right way.

But it's a good group. Like I said the last time, we're going to, we're a work in progress. We're going to work every day. We got some time. And by the way, Bellarmine, they're good. I mean, they're really good. So we got our hands full.

And then we leave for London. We got some time tomorrow. We'll probably do some things for Thanksgiving. The team and some of their families will be at the house. But probably go to the Salvation Army and serve and do some stuff, maybe stop by the Hope House later that night with my family and do some stuff.

And I would say, for all of us, you just think that, you know, one, I have a child that was born on Thanksgiving day, Megan, whose birthday was today, and the things that have happened for me and my family, I'm thankful.

How about the opportunity to coach here and be a part of what this goes on and be here for our fans, who are the greatest. They're engaged. I get a chance to do that. So I'm thankful for all that too. I would tell everybody, if anybody's, you're writing this or you're listening, reach out to somebody who you know may be by themselves. Invite 'em to your house. Maybe somebody that's older, maybe a widow. Maybe somebody that's moved to town and they're here by themselves. Invite 'em to the house. Bring them food and spend some time with 'em. I mean, it's a great time.

I think for all of us, that's why we do stuff at Thanksgiving. I want these kids to feel it, what it is, and the appreciation of people. And only by the grace of God we're not here trying to eat. Only by the grace of God. I mean, I didn't grow up in an Ivy League, you know. I mean, how did I bust through and do this? By the grace of God.

So seeing all this stuff, knowing -- you know, I'll just say one thing. Every year I'm hoping it's going to be easy. And at some point, it is not easy. This stuff is really hard. Thanksgiving's coming at a great time. Be thankful. Yeah,

it's hard. If it were easy, everybody would do it. It's hard.

Looking forward to tomorrow to be with the kids and do some of the stuff we're going to do. Then we start Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and it is, we got to get this right. I thought we did some good things defensively today. We did.

Q. When Matt was in here, he really praised the way that you guys passed the ball, but I wanted to specifically ask about Oscar. With so much of the attention on his rebounding, and rightly so, as well as the scoring, do you think his ability as a passer gets overlooked?

JOHN CALIPARI: He's gotten better. If you remember, he wasn't a real good passer a year ago, especially early in the year.

But to have five assists and one turnover and three steals, that's a big game. Now we have a belt that we give out after wins, the most impactful player. Who impacted the game. The staff gets it and it's a big shiny belt. Maybe they will show you.

He got it today. He was the most impactful, not because of points and rebounds, because of what you said, he had five assists, he had three steals and two blocks. That's impacting the game. He'll have the belt until the next win. You don't get, no belts on a loss. But maybe if he didn't take it already, because he wore it. He was wearing it around the locker room.

He wore it to the radio? Oh, geez.

Q. Early in the second half, it looked like C.J. may have stepped awkward, tweaked his hamstring or something. He never came back in.

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, because I got scared. Lance being sick, I said, If we don't need you, just, because this thing, this next week of practice to get us right is going to be vital. With him it was a cramp. He says, Even when I feel it cramp up, I get scared. So he was in there and I walked in and I said, Are you all right? He said, Yeah, I'm good. But I got scared. Which, understanding.

Cason I think hit knees. He just said, Get me out. But they were all pretty good.

Q. What have you seen defensively from Antonio since he's gotten here to today and I guess what else does he need to do to continue working?

JOHN CALIPARI: He needs to talk more. He needs to be

more engaged in what's happening. Not just playing his man. He does a pretty good job of playing his man. Now we got to take this to another level and say, the way you're playing offensively, some -- he started messing with the ball. That can be cured. You mess with the ball I'll take you out. Just pass it, shoot it, score. If you have a move to make, that's fine.

But when he gets in groups of twos and threes, he now is worried about his man and that's when you get beat by all the other stuff. Because basically you're in a zone. I'm taking this out. You take that that way. And he's learning. But I'll tell you what, he's a good player. He's a good player. So is C.J. One of 'em comes off the bench, I just, you know, I didn't like the defensive look to start the game. Maybe even at Michigan State, even though I thought we did some good stuff.

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