

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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Coach John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky 88, FAMU 68

Q. Can you see Cason taking another level despite what he was just able to do tonight overall?

JOHN CALIPARI: I didn't hear what you said.

Q. Does Cason have another level in his game despite what he did on the floor tonight?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, he made shots tonight. You know, we've got to keep working with him as he plays point. Decision making, seeing the court better. What he did today is he made shots so you couldn't go under on the pick-and-roll. He dings a ball in.

But he's a terrific player.

Let me just say this: Really happy. I thought Chris did some good stuff. I thought Adou did some good stuff. I really did.

Lance got the biggest rebound of the game on that missed free throw, and kick it out and we make a three, and it basically ends the game.

We're still not -- we left two time-outs and didn't run stuff the right way, too, and one of them the guy asked me, so you want me to do this. Yeah. And he didn't do it.

We're still not -- I told them after the game, you cannot be worried about how you're playing. You've got to worry about how we're playing. We've got to talk.

I like with Lance, we're physical. We're not getting bullied when he's in there. Now we've just got to figure some other stuff out.

It doesn't mean he's going to play 35 minutes a game, but you put him in, he mixes it up, he defends, he talks. He's trying to do stuff.

Q. Where is the balance; you've got some guys that

are struggling I've got to win the game versus what the team --

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, this one, like it got to 10 points, so you could imagine what if we lost the game: Why did you let him play through and you lose to Florida A&M? We had to play to win the game at the end. We did good stuff. We posted, we did it, Oscar -- that's how we finish a game. Not this team, but that's the first time. We ran clock, ran clock, ran clock, posted the ball, foul, two-point, they don't have enough time now to catch it.

But like I said, I'm not budging. This team, we -- combinations matter with this group. We're going to have to have some good combinations. We're still a work in progress, and I would tell everybody, just be patient. You know, if you've watched me work and coach in the past, it takes time to get it all together, and I'm not panicked. Some of the guys, I'm the biggest proponent for guys in that room.

We've got work to do now. We do. How about we didn't defend today like we've been defending. It's crazy. I mean, the one thing that we could rely on is that we would really, really guard. Well, they beat us on the bounce, they beat us shooting threes, they beat us offensive rebounding. We just had a little bit more than them, but Robert had his team ready to go.

Q. CJ had a big night --

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, we need CJ to win. We really do. I'm going to tell you, he's the one that made the pass to Oscar to get the two free throws. There were other passes that we're throwing that you're like, dude, you threw to the inside. That almost got stolen. Those are things that he's not going to make those kind of errors.

I told him, like I believe in you, kid. Making shots and making plays and he fights on defense, we switched, he fronted. The reason I had those guys in at the end, they're veterans, playing to win.

Q. This is another game against another HBCU; how important are these match-ups and the Unity Series as a whole to you and your team?

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JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I think it's important that we're using our platform here to promote other programs, and especially programs that are terrific programs that people don't know about. The HBCUs, you're talking about terrific coaches. It was fun walking the line after telling guys they played so well. They're thanking us for the hospitality.

But why we did it, how about we get a chance to honor Reggie Warford. That's a big deal. People, I would say they wouldn't know Reggie -- one of you guys wrote a story they sent to me. I don't look at names, but they sent me, and I read the Reggie article one of you did.

When I read it, I said, I can't believe this because now everyone knows what I know, and Goose was in it and talked about his importance. His family is here, Marissa is here, his two sons are here. So tying it all together is a pretty big deal.

Doing the series and continuing it, doing it next year -- again, you have to understand now I'm getting all the calls from all their coaches, we've got to be the next team, it's got to be us. It wouldn't have been so fun if we got beat, but we didn't, and we get to go home for Christmas with a 20-point win.

Q. On the defense, was it a lack of intensity? Is it because you're using different combinations --

JOHN CALIPARI: Partly. Partly. The other thing is, like I had to ask them at halftime, who are the two guys that have all the points. Do you know the number? Why would you leave the guy? There were two guys, and you left them, or you went out and guarded them with your arms down. Are you crazy? Are you not watching?

Again, this is hard. You know, playing here and playing for teams that come in and are inspired to play, you've got to bring it. If you're into you and you're out there by yourself, this is impossible. You have to be together, all of you and talking. We did some good stuff, but at halftime -- no one shot 50 percent on us this year. They did. I don't know what the game was. They shot 52 for the game? That's the first team to do that to us.

Now, just so you know, my stuff has been packed since this morning, and my guess is their stuff has been packed since this morning, too, and ready to get out of here, but there's no excuse for what they did to us offensively. But give them credit; they were playing inspired.

Again, they haven't shot the ball from the three that way all year, but they did today.

Q. John, with SEC play on the horizon, how do you assess the mental toughness of your team so far this season?

JOHN CALIPARI: You know, I mean, the free-throw shooting is driving me crazy because we should be one of the best in the country. We're missing front-end one-on-ones, like badly, like demoralizingly.

Now, just like anything else, they bank three shots in. That's how it is here. Bank, bank, you're like, that's normal here.

But we should be one of the best free-throw shooting teams. Again, that is mental toughness. I don't know if you know, in the Power Five Gonzaga games, we're shooting 58 percent from the foul line. 58 percent. You can't win games shooting 58 percent. We're taking four more threes than all those teams per game. Four more. So you're doing some things different, but making free throws is how you advance.

We've got to do it. We haven't been doing it. We're doing different things and making them shoot one-on-ones and make 10 in a row and make 100 before you leave the gym. I really believe the more attention you bring to it, the worse it gets. I also know it is contagious; when one guy gets up and misses two, the next guy is missing two.

So I like, like Cason today, I said, here's a good one: Don't get fouled, then you don't have to miss it. That's what I said to him. Don't get fouled; how about that? Don't even try. Just avoid it and lay it in.

Like I said, we're one of those teams that hasn't figured all this stuff out yet, and you notice I tried all different kind of combinations today, but I wanted to see them. I wanted to see what looked -- I thought maybe Ugonna and Oscar together would be okay. Oscar has got to guard a 4 and he left their 4 twice for I think six points. Like you can't leave that guy; he's a shooter.

Again, you may say, well, it's the first time you played him, and you're right. You're right. Maybe we do it again. I thought Ugonna in the second half did some good stuff. I thought Adou played well. It's kind of like waiting your turn, and he's the one guy that hasn't had the opportunity that the other guys on the team have had. But his time is coming, you watch.

I'll say this, and I'm not saying this lightly. I don't know when it's going to happen, but he will have a huge impact on college basketball. He will. Because he can play basketball. He's tough physically. Plays better in the games than he does in practice, to be honest with you. He

does stuff, I'm like why -- if you showed me all this stuff when we practiced, you're building the confidence in me, too. But I'll tell you, he's a great kid. I love him to tell. I hugged him, I said, look, man, I love you; you're going to be fine. But it's hard not playing.

Can I just say merry Christmas to everyone here, and I hope you're with family, and I hope you get a chance to step back and reflect and know all the good stuff for you and your family, all the things that have happened, being thankful for all that, and I'm going to be able to be with my family, so I'm kind of excited.

Thanks.

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