

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Saturday, December 31, 2022

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky 86, Louisville 63

JOHN CALIPARI: Just one thing, I was so happy with the response when Kenny was introduced. It just shows the kind of fans that we have. It shows the respect and it was just like, I said only at Kentucky would that happen. Now, it didn't happen before. But it happened with Kenny, and people know what he did here and the work he put in. You know how much time he spent with the kids and let me just say this, I know we won the game but his team is getting better. There's no one that I would want running a program knowing if it were my son, I want him to play for Kenny. So just felt I needed to say that.

Questions?

Q. After the Missouri game, you talked about limiting the rotations to solve some of the team's issues and only some players played double-digits minutes. Was that intentional?

JOHN CALIPARI: It's intentional. The biggest thing, we all, not just us, me, too, for good what I've been through every year to get a team right. I can remember the twins; we didn't go till March. I can remember losing two games in Las Vegas and us all panicked. I can remember us losing that game in Seton Hall and saying we're not very good, and that was with P.J. and Keldon. It just takes time when you've got new teams.

I'm mad at myself because we needed to be playing more deliberate. Playing faster and quicker and doing that, that's all good, and you're scoring 60. We played deliberate, which is what my teams have done historically. Still play fast and shoot threes. We didn't shoot as many today but we scored a lot of points playing deliberate. And you could say, well, it's Louisville.

If my team plays this way, deliberate, like we're flying. But if it's not there, and that's why I got upset with a couple guys when we were playing deliberate, you didn't have something and you turned it over, or why did you do that, we're not playing that way.

In other words, they score. We were running on makes and quickly get into stuff. Well, guess what, that was killing Antonio and it was killing Chris Livingston, because their minds were -- we needed to be more deliberate.

I think, again, Sahvir, he had four turnovers today but I've got to look at them. The one late I was not happy with but I think it's better for him. If we rebound it, we're running it right up your back. And if not, and they score, you know, let's get this thing moving. And you notice today that the ball went from one side, we moved it to each other, we passed it, they went zone, the ball moved, it zipped. Boom, boom, boom. We've been working on it.

We've got to continue to work on it and I'm going to say one more thing: I was happy Louisville came out at half and came out swinging a little bit. Because I've got to know, like, you guys cave in, are you fragile? And we've been -- I've been spending half of my time working on guys mentally and getting them in a different frame of mind.

And so like we are going to play now, every team we're playing from here on in is going to be hard. So it may be a closer game. So what? They make a run, we make a run. We've just got to play -- and it takes me I'm, it's taken me time every year I've been here.

You know, it's funny, I'm sitting with Jeff Shepherd. He talked about his time here. He said, "We lost three home games. We lost to Mississippi at home." And then we started getting it going, and then we won the conference tournament. Didn't win the conference and then went and won the national title.

I mean, it takes time when you've got new teams to do this. I wish I was smarter. And would be quicker to pick stuff up. But I seem to do the same thing.

Q. How do you get Jacob to carry over this mentality to future games and be consistent with it? Especially the way he came out the first few minutes attacking.

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, we've done a lot of work, and it's not been on the court. You had guys feeling the weight of the world, and that's why it came -- it's not life-and-death.



We got punched in the mouth, and we're still alive. Now we've got the next game. We have the whole league ahead of us. We're fine. But when these kids feel it, they are 18, 19, 20, and they are feeling the weight of the world, and I'm talking, like, free and loose and I'm wearing a suit today and I'm dancing in there and I'm wanting them to know I'm good.

But they got to get in a good frame of mind and then get hit in the mouth, and are you fragile or do you keep playing? Today he kept playing. And now he's going to do it against better teams. You watch.

Now you want to know why I started him? I just felt that I needed to do that with all the stuff we had been doing, and I had to thank Lance, because it's funny, I walk into practice and Lance's mom is there, and she's a great lady. And I said -- I gave her a hug, and I said, "And you're here, and I'm not starting your son tomorrow." You know, I had to tell her. She was, "I'm fine." She wasn't fine. Parents are never fine.

Ut he accepted it; and I told him, "I'm going to play Daimion, too." And so that's what a great teammate is. Some of the guys that I talked about being all in that we're going to be more deliberate and we're going to play a certain way, one guy said, "I'm absolutely all in. I'll do whatever you need me to do."

So I keep coming back to: Every day I walk in practice -- I love this team. I wish we were a little bit tougher. But I love the pieces. CJ being out hurts us, but he gives Adou a chance. So now Adou gets a chance to play and you're going to get a chance to see him.

But you know, the early grind of what we went through, maybe we needed to go through it, and we'll see going forward. But that was something they had to feel, the grind, the deliberateness of how we played, passing the ball. You ready? Just to pass it. Well, I've got to pass it for someone to score. No, just pass it to pass it. And they did that today.

So Cason was good. We're still -- my job is to teach them how to win basketball games. I have not done a good job of that to this point obviously. But you've also got to make free throws. I'm doing everything, trying everything, and about, but you noticed when they started going, it's contagious, but how about the first three? What did you say? The first three, oh, my gosh, we may miss 15.

So again, I respect these kids, playing here, it's really hard. Really rewarding but it's hard. I said, there's a tax you play to play here and coach here. There's a tax. You've got to be thick skinned and tough.

But this is a good group. I can't imagine our fans aren't jacked that this is our team. They want to win every game.

So do I. I want to win more than the fans want to win. But let's get it right. Let's go forward. Let's see what we are. Let's see with playing the way we're playing now where we take things.

Q. Struggling the way Jacob was coming into the game and he makes a couple early. Do you just not say anything?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I hugged him in one huddle. At Missouri, I had him in my room, and I hugged him and I said, "Do you know how much I love you and how much I want you to do well? But I can't do this for you, and you've got to get in a different frame of mind." And we talked about it.

But he went into that game, and what's the word above awful? Then it became, all right, where do we go with this and how do we do this.

He did some things. He talked to some people. I watched him practice and I loved what I saw. I called him in I said, "I'm going to start you tomorrow, what do you think?"

He said, "Okay."

I said, "No. No."

"Yes, I want to you start me, Coach. Please! Thank you!"

I said, "Come back and see me."

So before practice he came in, "I really want to start."

"Great, then you'll start."

Again when you're dealing with team, you have got Lance. Think about what Lance has done to hold down the fort and give us a chance when we went through this. And Daimion I thought was better today. Did some good stuff.

Q. When someone like CJ is out, and Antonio struggled today, did that change the way you play or did you let them try to play through it?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, we have a bunch of guys that can make threes but those two are the best two. Antonio's issue isn't what he was doing offensively. It's what he was doing defensively. When I put him back in and play through, he made two baskets and three floaters that were big. Did he make two free throws or one of two? I think he made one of two. Three of four? Perfect.

Look, today I think we shot 64 percent from the line. We've just got to make that 72 or 73. That's three more free throws made, three more. We get to that, you're playing winning basketball and you're making free throws, now we're the team we're trying to become.

Q. You were talking about Jeff Shepherd. I remember when they lost that Valentine's Day, Ole Miss, they got together and said, we can't do this on our own and we have to submit to coach and the will of the team? Is it similar?

JOHN CALIPARI: You have to ask the players. They came together. Look, you think -- you want to do it yourself because you want to do that, and then you get overwhelmed and swamped and you look around and say, I can't do this myself. We need to do this together.

And that's normally when teams come together. What's the comment I've made since I've been here? What's the only thing that brings about change? Wow. A crisis. And here, it's an earthquake if you lose a game or two. Earthquake; it's a crisis.

And now, it's overwhelming. I don't pay attention to decompress it. I don't know if they don't. Sometimes I think they are reading that stuff. You just can't. It's a different time and age.

Jeff, I said, what if you had social media back then? He said, oh, we would have gotten killed. And then we did our thing.

But normally it will bring guys together. Bring them together. I'm just coming back to love the team, I grabbed Adou after and I said, "Adou, you're like family. I coached your dad. You're family to me."

You're now in the rotation but I can't tell you how much you're going to play because someone may be playing really well and you won't. Or you go to Missouri, and someone wasn't playing well at all and then just left you in.

It's hard for these kids to step back so others can step forward because they want to get out and play and perform and do it.

Do you guys mind if I go out and do radio? I appreciate everybody being here. Can I tell you, happy new year, hope you have a great next year, everybody in the building. This has been a little struggle up to this point so I'm looking forward to turning the page, and let's go. Thank you.