

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Tuesday, January 3, 2023

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

John Calipari

Press Conference



Kentucky 74, Louisville 71

JOHN CALIPARI: It's all fixable, how we finish off, what we do and in how we play with nine, eight seconds on the clock, who should have the ball at that point, it's all fixable.

I love their mentality. And I also told them, "You know who else's mentality I love right now?" And I looked around the room. Mine. I felt good all day about the game, and I knew it wasn't going to be easy.

But getting away from all the clutter and everything else, let's just play. Let's coach our team. Worry about the next game we're playing, which is this one.

That is a really good team. They have done a great job. Terrific defensive team.

And then at the end, you know, we foul a three-point shooter, and we give up a 3 when Cason had the layup, and all of a sudden it's five. But you know what, it's us. We've got to be in these kind of events to figure out what we do.

Jacob making the three. Jacob making the free throws. I mean, big deal. And thing about where he was three games ago, four games ago, five games ago. You know, part of what we do, and I'm not just saying me, I'm saying coaches. You're not only coaching the skill, the schemes. You're having to deal with young people who are getting inundated with stuff.

And an adult can keep it away and ignore it. Well, sometimes, an 18- and 19-year-old can't. When he said, "I was in a dark place," think about that.

Now, there are probably people, you look at it and say, "What are you talking about?"

And all I say is, "When you say, ah, that's nothing, put your name in there instead of his, or one of my other -- put your name in there and tell me how you feel right now."

All I'm doing is worrying about these young people. I'm coaching, you're noticing offensively, more deliberate. We're still running. We're still flying, we're still moving. But the ball is moving more deliberate. We are more efficient now, and the game was shorter. But I'm happy we won. Six turnovers, come on, and they are a terrific defensive team, and outrebound them. So those two things were pretty good.

Yes?

Q. Oscar said after Louisville you and I talked about being more positive towards some of --

JOHN CALIPARI: No, that's not true. I don't know who told you that. No.

What I told him is, "I believe in you and I'm holding you accountable but you're capable of doing whatever you choose to do. But you've got to believe in yourself."

And I told him, not more positive, "If you screw up, I'm just leaving it alone. So I'm not going to try to correct you in the game. We'll correct you after."

It wasn't, "You're okay," and he got dunked on. "Yeah, really you're fine"; he got dunked on again. "You're going to" -- but he reached out to Bob Rotella, sports psychologist, and he put himself in a different place.

So I mean, it's important but it's not -- no. I'm the same coach. I coach the same way. I don't know who said that that we told -- you know, he was just being more positive. What? I coach. I encourage.

But I've got to hold him accountable. I've got to hold him to a high standard, and that's every one of them, not just Jacob. All of them.

Q. How long difficult is that line to walk, holding them accountable?

JOHN CALIPARI: Tough. Tough. It's tough. Now I want you to understand, and I always tell them this: You've got a guy that loves you and will be with you till the wheels fall off, will never leave your side, and he's getting on you to



challenge you to be better and holding you accountable. How can that really affect you when you know, dude loves me. The guy is for me.

The guy -- now, again, holding guys to a high standard, you know, sometimes it's, I believe in them more, or I'm asking them to do stuff maybe they are just not capable of doing.

But I knew what Jacob was. The biggest thing was not being positive and all that. I said, "I'm going to start you next game." If you want to know the truth, that's what it was. "I'm going to start you next game."

And he kind of, "Okay."

I go, "What? No. No. You come back and see me. We'll talk about it."

Where's the, thank you, I want that, I want to start again, I want to be that guy. So he came up, and that's what he said.

I said, "Great, you're starting. You're fine."

And I think again, sometimes saying you believe, sometimes you've got to do that and say, now I'm showing you I believe.

Yes?

Q. In both conference games now, Oscar has played a full 40 minutes. Early in the season, you kind of had him on a minutes things because of his injuries. How far has he come and what does it mean for the team?

JOHN CALIPARI: Made free throws today. How about that? Made free throws today. That's big for us. Because we are going to him. In most cases, you'll see, we're bigger, we're fine, we'll be able to guard him until you get in a game with him, and this kid has thrown 255 pounds on you before he shoots. It's kind of hard, and he's sturdy.

But did I play Cason 40 minutes? You have to understand, I've had teams where I've played five guys, and six and seven played nine minutes. I had guards that played 38 minutes a game at UMASS. I did it -- I've done it that way, and here is what happens. You start seeing chemistry and them growing together because they are on the court a lot. And I thought that's what this team needed.

So now, like I said, how good was Daimion, though, today? Damion was really good. But Adou and Ugonna did not get an opportunity. I grabbed them after. I just said, "You've got to be ready."

Antonio didn't get a whole lot of minutes. Well, Chris was mixing it up and doing some good stuff. So I left him in there. But we need Antonio. We need CJ. We need one more guy that can go and stretch a game for us.

Q. You're talking about your guys being inundated, but have you ever considered just banning social media?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, I called President Biden to see if we could do that. (Laughter).

No. Because they have got to learn to live with it. And if you're going to -- here is what I'm always saying. The good stuff is poison. It's poison. Don't read it. You're never quite as good as it seems and it's never quite as bad as it seems. The bad stuff creates anxiety, so why would you read it? Why would you look at it?

It's hard. These kids are on their phones all the time. And if they are reading it, then you'd better deal with it, and if it's affecting you in a negative way, you're not very smart. The thing with -- you don't know if there are fans, and they may be Kentucky fans but not basketball. You don't know. Who are they?

So now the other schools start piling on and throwing stuff and this -- and they are not even our fans. And I would say this: You try to tell them it's a minority in most cases. But you know, like I said, it's the tax you pay when you coach and play here. It's part of the tax. We've got engaged, raging fans. And when you win, whoooo, and when you lose, woo. They are engaged. So deal with it.

Q. So is this a five-man team? Have you found the rotation you wanted or is this just the circumstance right now?

JOHN CALIPARI: We'll see going forward. What if there's foul trouble? You want to play a lot of minutes, you'd better not foul. You get two fouls in the first half, I'm sitting you out, especially if you're one of those guys.

But you're noticing, we're flowing more in sync. You could just see it. So it's all the stuff we've been talking and working, and they have responded. Let me tell you, they were knocked for a loop now, we all were. I mean, the first game, come on, what in the world?

And then you play as bad we did with UCLA, but they made us that way and we are were still in a two-point game and then didn't finish it. But when you see this, we almost didn't finish this. So we've got to work on that kind of stuff.

But I'll say this again: That stuff is all fixable. I was stunned that Sahvir missed that free throw. Stunned. If you were in our practices when I stopped practice and we are on the baseline and you've got to shoot them one-on-one, he walks up there so calm, bang, bang. That's why I was saying, "Throw it to him. Let him foul you." And he missed it.

But you know what, we made enough to win the game. We're still learning about this team; I am. Just be patient. Again, I'm telling everybody, be patient with them, because they are trying. And they are -- literally, I enjoy going to every practice.

I enjoy walking in because there is no -- Daimion could be mad. He came in the office and we hugged. I mean, coaching Oscar, even though he does stuff and says some stuff that you shake your head like, where did you bet that from, but you know what he is? A nice person. He doesn't want to harm anybody and he's trying to get 20 and 20.

Yes?

Q. That last answer, you mentioned about flowing and being in sync, and it seemed like from the jump you guys were that way right from the tip-off. How do you bottle that up?

JOHN CALIPARI: Just keep working on it. One of the things that I've done with this team that I've never done is we're scrimmaging for at least an hour the day before the game. Now, you understand that's dangerous. I've never done it before. This team needs it.

You know why? We look out of sync. We're not smooth. Let -- we've got to. And if we -- somebody steps on something, we'll have to deal with it. But that's with this team.

You remember the team in 2014, I believe it was, when we went to the National Championship game? At the end of the year, we were practicing -- no, it was with Julius Randle and that group, James Young '14. We were practicing -- I can't stand for three hours. We were practicing. I had to go sit in a chair, three-hour practices, at the end of the year. I never do that.

But you know what? That's what that team needed. This team needs it. Keep doing it. Keep talking to them. Keep encouraging them. Keep holding them accountable. I was kind of mean yesterday morning. They will tell you. Oh, I was telling guys straight up, and I got a little tough in the practice. Same way. Wasn't positive.

It's holding them accountable. But you know what, I tell

them again, I believe in them. We're talking about all these teams. You're seeing teams get knocked off. We've got a top-five point guard. We can really shoot the ball. We don't shoot it every time but we can really shoot the ball. We also have.

Q. National players.

JOHN CALIPARI: There you go. Knew somebody would know. We've got Oscar. No one else has him. You ready for this is this we've got terrific athletes. How about Daimion? How about Jacob. How about toughness in Cason and Chris? How about a seven footer that didn't get in that can block shots? We've got a good bench.

Well, wait a minute, then why is -- what? Takes time when you have a new team. I'm not -- I'm impatient, too. But you know, we've just got to keep striving. I mean, the next game we play, that's all I'm worried about. They have tomorrow off. We can't do anything tomorrow.

So we'll go practice on Thursday, practice on Friday, and travel down and we play at noon. Noon, at Alabama, and it will be sold out, you know that. And that's great. Let's go. Let's see where we are with that.

Yes?

Q. Not finishing as well tonight, is that guys being tired, losing focus after playing 35, 40 minutes? And if it is, do you -- does this help build that foundation moving forward?

JOHN CALIPARI: We've just got to be clearer in how we're going to finish games. I've made it clear in how we're playing offensively, the flow of the game. I've made it really clear and easy and narrow. We've got to do the same with that. So it's all fixable. I mean, there are certain guys that can't have the ball with eight, nine seconds on the clock. Is that clear to everybody? It can't be them. They could be off the ball, and if you throw it to them, they are running in and doing something great. On the ball, some other -- you know what I'm saying? It's all fixable, it is.

I'm happy we won the game. If we'd have played this way and lost, I'd have been really disappointed but I would have said, we're fine; the stuff we are not doing is fixable. Fouling a three-point shooter? Are you kidding me? He's a freshman. He's a freshman. He didn't know you can't knock the guy down when he shoots. Played a good game, though.

How about how hard Chris plays and how active he is? Like, and I'm saying it again, with all that we have, him

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

playing that way, think of the difference he makes.

All right, guys, it's like eleven o'clock, let me go do this radio.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

