

# University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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Lexington, Kentucky, USA

## Coach John Calipari

### Press Conference



Kentucky 76, Texas A&M 67

JOHN CALIPARI: They had won seven in a row, and they were beating everybody. They beat a couple teams by 25.

I'm proud of our guys. We're getting better. Another game we shoot 40 percent and win.

Took more threes in the first half than most of my teams take in a game, but I looked, they were all open. They were open. So you've got to shoot it.

You know, they are a great free-throw shooting team. They're a great rebounding team. Again, in the second half, we rebounded the ball and had 12 turnovers, which is a couple of them were like, what in the world.

But we're getting better. My team, I'm proud of them. Love CJ. Missed every shot in the first half, and I said, you'd better keep shooting them or I won't play you. Antonio was the most impactful player. How about ass core? They doubled and triple-teamed him, so he didn't get that many baskets, but he didn't care. He ended up getting 17 rebounds and only seven points.

His assists were hockey assists. In other words, he threw them out, that guy threw it to the next guy, and that guy made it.

It tells you a lot about the guys, but Antonio Reeves, those two baskets late, you need somebody to just go get a basket, and he did it.

But give credit to A&M. They're a terrific basketball team.

A couple questions. It's midnight, so I'm not going to answer a whole lot. (Laughter).

**Q. After the Bellarmine game you said grit was the thing between Jacob becoming special. How close is he getting to that?**

JOHN CALIPARI: He's getting better. He's getting better.

He's learning to mix it up, but see, grit is not just physical. I'm going to fight somebody. Grit is I missed two baskets, and it doesn't affect my defense, and I still rebound. I go 1 for 8, but I get 11 rebounds and I guard. That is grit.

You know, and let me say this: What a great crowd, great fans. We've got the classiest fans. They're not rooting against the other team. They're cheering us on. We've got to stay that way, with every kid on my team.

These are young people, and I would just ask you, if it were your son, how would you want him to be treated by a home fan? Any of our guys, it's your son; how do you want him to be treated?

I see these kids as my sons, and I get protective. But this group, they're for each other. I was putting a guy in, and he said, no, let him stay, they're playing well. I went back to him -- they're doing good, and then I said, no, I've got to make this move.

But it shows you that we're coming together, and they're about each other, and they're even calling their own plays, which you and I know, every year I say they're starting to become empowered. They're being empowered, and they feel it, that this is their team.

It's taken a long time to get there, but thank goodness we have time.

**Q. This is the third straight game, you've kind of leaned into that five-man group. I think today that group outscored by them a dozen in about 14, 13 minutes. What do you like about that five, and what challenge does it present the other team?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, the biggest thing is you've got to guard all five guys, but there's another guy on the court that you've got to pay special attention to, the kid, what's his name, 34. So now all of a sudden you have everybody on the court, they can't really -- and if they do, it's what happened, you're going to get threes.

Now, again, everybody says, just shoot all threes. Well, what if you go 2 for 25? You'll be happy and say Cal did everything right. We're a team that if you play us this way,

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we'll take the threes. If you're leaving people, we'll take them. But our game is we can shoot poorly and still win. If we're doing the gritty, the defense, the diving on the floor -- we took charges today. Jacob took a charge, CJ took a charge.

But they got to the rim. They ended up shooting 49 percent against us. And they make every free throw. If you foul them, you lose.

**Q. On a night where Oscar is in foul trouble and they kind of take him out of the game, how important is it for your group to have other guys step up and make shots in the clutch?**

JOHN CALIPARI: And you've got to play different because he's not in there. I tried to put Chris Livingston at 4 when Jacob got hurt. Not fair. Haven't played him there. So now I'm out there, and I had to take him out because he says, I only know two things. You think about that. That's like putting a guy in the game, and he said, I really haven't played this position, but I didn't think we had a choice.

But it's nice to see you've got guys -- we've got unbelievable leadership. Lance is an unbelievable leader. Maybe not playing a whole lot but still leads. Still is a big piece of what's going on.

**Q. You said it's taken a long time to where they're starting to get empowered, but just three games ago was about as low as it could get with the South Carolina loss --**

JOHN CALIPARI: You know we had two starters out that game, right? Did we have two starters out that game? I think we did.

But yes, yes. And because, again, the avalanche brought them together. The only thing that brings about change is a crisis. That was a crisis. They came together. They talk about a meeting, I'm telling you, the only thing that brings about change is a crisis. You can have a meeting with no crisis, and you're wasting time.

But you have that, and they got together, and I'm telling you, the assistant -- two of my assistants were in the meeting and just said, they got emotional, the assistants did, because part of it was, we're not doing this anymore, and if you do, I'm going to be the one to say it; Coach won't have to. They said some things to each other and made each other talk. It's like they're mature; here they are. Really smart kids, too, really intelligent.

Sometimes when you're that smart, you overthink things and you think too much.

Like I said, I haven't -- they knew I believed in them, and at Tennessee, I told them, if I have to drag you over hot coals to where you're supposed to go, we're breaking through, so you can do it or I'm dragging you, but we're going to do this.

I'll be honest with you, as a coach it's way easier when they drag me. It's way easier.

The other one just beats you down.

**Q. You mentioned how you had to adjust the lineup with Oscar's foul trouble --**

JOHN CALIPARI: I think he got a foul called on him 15 seconds into the game, National Player of the Year, but go ahead.

**Q. At this point in the season how comfortable with finding out the lineups, the rotations --**

JOHN CALIPARI: I'm having fun. I'm telling them in huddles, isn't this great? Are you enjoying this? Quit looking at the score, just play. If you have plays to make, make them. I believe in you.

Now, I'm going to come back to, people talk about how to do this, how to do that. You'd better understand if you're ever -- if you're a coach, you understand the mental part of this is as big as all the other stuff. So making sure that they continue to believe in each other and themselves, yet holding them accountable: I'm not accepting something that's lack of effort, not taking a charge, not driving on the ball, making a crazy play when you have a teammate wide open. I'm not settling for that. But everything else, I'm good with this group. I'm good with them.

**Q. Your team shot today 32 three-pointers. That's the most your team has taken in more than 11 years. Were you okay with that?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Another of my teams took more?

**Q. Chattanooga in 2011, 33, and ETSU, 33, Arkansas, 33, but these were all 11, 12 years ago.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Hold on. How many did we make?

Chattanooga, throw them out, even though they're really good. I have a feeling we made a lot in that game. Give me the other ones.

**Q. You're really putting me on the spot.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Come on. You want to throw numbers out, throw numbers.

**Q. You made 15 against East Tennessee State.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Go Arkansas. You said we took 33.

**Q. It's not even on the board.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, because it didn't go past four. 10 out of 33? Did we win the game? I'm guessing we didn't.

**Q. East Tennessee State it was the NCAA Tournament.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Oh, Bledsoe went nuts that game. Yeah. I wish he would have gone nuts in the West Virginia game.

**Q. I guess my question was are you okay with this many attempts today?**

JOHN CALIPARI: I just thought -- you watch the game. Were they open? Yeah. Some of them we missed; did you go, how in the world did he miss that, because they're not machines and they're not robots, and there's sometimes they miss two, it's like, the next guy misses and the next guy -- it's contagious.

But the other side of it is we had the courage to keep shooting. CJ, Antonio, they had the courage to keep shooting. How about Chris's two? How about Cason is 0 for 4? He's 0 for 7 at halftime. 0 for 7, 0 for 4 from the three, but he came back and banged that one at the top, which was a big play.

These kids are believing in each other and themselves.

We did something different today. My past life on weekend games, I always put my team in a hotel, and I did that because all I was trying to do was get them together more. I wanted two in a hotel room, not one in their own room.

As the season went on and we had what everybody used to call "Camp Cal," every weekend game and every weekday game if there was no class we stayed in a hotel, had dinner together, had breakfast together, did everything -- wanting them to be with us. I did it last night. You say, why did you do it. I don't know, something popped in my head and said, why don't we stay at the Hyatt. We have never shot in Rupp Arena prior to a game since I've been here.

Now, Jimmy Dykes said Coach Sutton did it every game. They shot in that building. We have never done it. Well, we did it this time, and then we start off and can't make a

shot.

But the whole idea was weekend games, why not. Why not? Why not be together? Why not have a meal together? Why not go walk through together? Why not have a breakfast together? Why not walk to a shoot-around together? It's something that I've done with different teams, I just never did it here, but going forward I think it's something that we'll probably do because this team is getting closer and closer and closer.

**Q. You talk about guys blocking out the shooting stats, don't worry about --**

JOHN CALIPARI: We also collected their phones and all their stuff, iPads, everything. We collected all of it. Then they woke up in the morning, where's my phone? My phone...

**Q. You mentioned the shooting stats for players to block that out, ignore it. Cason is 4 for 13 today but he has that offensive rebound off I think the free throw miss --**

JOHN CALIPARI: Big play.

**Q. Gets it to Reeves.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Turned it over late, threw it to the wrong -- what are you doing? Why would you do that?

**Q. Seemed like a big momentum --**

JOHN CALIPARI: It was, and that's why we put him on the foul line, because he's a beast. He is. He's playing point guard for the first time in his life.

Now, I want to tell you, I've played off guards at point many times in my career. You've just got to play a little different. The reason I like Sahvir, the game is faster, and we need to get something up-and-down. I love having him in. I love having -- did you see the assist he threw where he got in the lane and he threw it to Antonio? Loved that. He also mixes it up.

But I've also played with off guards at point. They're just different. But in most cases, it gives you one more scorer on the court.

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