

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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John Calipari

Press Conference



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Q. Chris Livingston, after he looked at the stat sheet from tonight. I know he's a guy you wrestled with how to use him all year. How has that process gone and how rewarding is it now to see him figure it out?

JOHN CALIPARI: There's no one on this -- he reminds me a little bit of Shai. Like, really smart. Cares, like, too much. Was listening to too many voices. And building your confidence, he was doing it in practice and then you got to have a demonstrated performance in the game. He's now that guy.

Now part of it, C.J.'s out, but the way he's playing now people coming back are going to be fighting for minutes too because he needs to be on the court.

But he's not the only one. He's building his own self esteem, his own confidence. Antonio did it today late in the game. I told him, Man, you got to be the guy with three minutes to go you're making a dagger shot, you're making dagger free throws. You can't -- Cason, he's not making shots, but he's doing so many other things to play well. Even Oscar's building his confidence. You might say, Well -- wait a minute. Yeah, he had a knee operation. He was out four weeks. He should have been out six weeks. So we're just coming into our own. Jacob's doing some good stuff.

How about Adou? Again. Like, Adou. He's just getting it done. He comes up with balls. He is so tough physically. I'm going to tell you, and I said it to him, he's going to be a guy that has a major impact on college basketball. He will. You watch. And I think he's still growing, by the way. I think he grew an inch since he's been here.

Q. Early in the year you talked about how you thought this was going to be a really good defensive team. Is today and the last few games starting to look like what you imagined?

JOHN CALIPARI: Not in the second half. And, look, Rick

is a great coach. Obviously, you know, he's a great friend. But he, they went to a weave and all they were doing is dribble drive. So they said, Forget all this screening and all this other stuff. They're fighting us. So now we're just going to space the court and try to dribble drive. And we'll make threes and fade screens and all that. They totally changed how they played.

The thing that bothered me is two inbound passes. Instead of breaking free we had a guy saying, Just throw it here. Just throw it. We work every day on getting open. And you don't get open by going like that (indicating.) And we did it twice to start the half and gave them a chance and gave them life.

But when we needed to make a basket, we did. So it was good.

Q. Cason goes about 33 minutes without making a turnover there for a stretch. What does that say about his focus?

JOHN CALIPARI: Who is that?

Q. Cason Wallace. And the way he's kind of grown into the point guard role.

JOHN CALIPARI: You said he didn't make a shot in 30 what?

Q. Well he made some shots. He went 33 minutes without a turnover in the middle of the game there.

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, and they're a team that turns you over. Now how many turnovers did we have up there? We had 19. And he had a bunch of 'em. So, yeah, he's getting better. He was ready to play. He hasn't been good in afternoon games. Now what's the next level up to that? And I reminded him, This team needs everybody. You have to be ready to play. You can't come in and foul twice and then sit because -- no.

And he is such a great kid. He takes all the shots I throw at him. It doesn't phase him. He knows I care about him. I love him. So he just, he's a better shooter than he's shooting right now. We missed free throws down the



stretch. Come on. Come on. We're a good free throw shooting team.

Again, where is that? That's mental then. That's the part of, We may lose -- no. You only think about winning. You refuse to lose. And that's all we're riding right now.

Q. What did you like what you saw from your team in that first half to build that halftime lead?

JOHN CALIPARI: I didn't know the halftime lead because I didn't look at the clock or the scoreboard until I got in at halftime. What I liked was -- and I'm trying to get my team to play that way. Forget about score. Just play. You can't be playing for result. Just play.

What I liked was how we defended and how we rebounded. We out rebounded 'em by eight. You understand, in the country they're like the best -- they're a plus eight rebounding. And we ended up being plus eight in the first half.

So they're tough, they're physical. They got good guards. They got guys out. So do we. But they got guys out. And those guys really make them better. TV guys. Go ahead.

Q. You mentioned stacking wins, refusing to lose. Do you feel like these couple wins here are going to be enough to get you going through -- it's a tough stretch here the rest of the season with Auburn?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, I said this -- and I'm trying -- you win a game, I don't want it to come across, but -- talking us out of the NCAA Tournament does not work. You either play yourself in or you play yourself out. So people talking, You're done. And I just said, Look, don't listen to it. I told our fans. Our fans in that building. We lead the nation in attendance. We lead the nation in attendance. And our fans in that game helped us win that game. And so all I'm saying to them, Don't listen to all the garbage. And if you hear it, turn it off. Turn your computer off. Just have good thoughts about this team. Because this team is trying, they're fighting, they're great kids.

I've said all along we were going to breakthrough. We've had two losses that you would like to have back. We've had other games, really the first game, but, you know what, none of that matters now. Everything is us going forward. So we have a tough game. We got road games, two tough road games. We got two tough home games. Play the games. Let's see how we are. Let's see if we get healthy. Let's see if we get better.

Q. You only took eight threes. Was that the game plan?

JOHN CALIPARI: Who did?

Q. You did. You only took eight 3-pointers. Was that your game plan to drive the ball on 'em, try to get it inside?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well much of the game we had Adou and Chris. They're okay three-point shooters. And Cason, who went 0-8 last game. How did he do this game? 0-3. So he's 0-11. Would you tell him to shoot more threes? So you take what they give you and you take the shot you can make.

Antonio made one or two, but you know, we're just trying to -- how do we -- what is the team giving us. We'll take what they give you. And if that means we're shooting 25, 30 threes. We will. We've done it. If that means we shot -- geez, we were only 3-8. That's like a UMass team. That's truly refuse to lose.

Q. You hold a team under 40, it really tends to help you at both ends of the floor. I mean, tonight in the first half it was noticeable. You get the ball and they're out of position more often than not because you guys know how to push it up the floor.

JOHN CALIPARI: We're trying really hard to get it ahead. But what was happening -- it was driving me crazy -- our wings refuse to come back and catch the ball. They just kept drifting to the corners. So we couldn't throw it ahead. We want to throw it ahead, look to the post, swing the ball so we can just play. We didn't do it.

But you're right. If you defend, you got to rebound. And you rebound and you're going to get some stuff out. You'll get some open threes. You get some -- you know, we're playing Oscar a little bit different now. Because they were just sitting three guys on him. So now we're playing him inside, but we're also playing him outside. We're putting him at the elbows, we're putting him in the corners. We're just -- he's shooting the ball better. How about late in the game we went to him to shoot free throws. I had one guy on my shoulder, he didn't want it. This guy, they missed two. So we'll throw it to Oscar. He'll go make 'em.

But we have to be that tough team, the 50/50 balls, the rebounds, and we got to play with a spirit. I keep telling 'em, at this time of the year you got to have more fun than the other team. You have to have more fun than the other team. You got to be enjoying playing. And I told them, Your whole life you've enjoyed basketball. I know -- we had the '96 and '98, '97 teams in there. They know what this is to go lose a home game or lose a game or lose two or lose to Mississippi at home first time in 30 years. They

know. No one else has gone through that except those guys and our guys and my teams in the past.

So I just said, you got to enjoy this stuff. Enjoy it. I'm enjoying it. Now I'm coaching during the game and I'm holding 'em accountable. Especially stuff we're teaching.

But this is a good team and like I said, this is -- we got tough games coming up. We got -- how many do we have left? Four? We got four. They just told me Florida was the next game. I didn't even know. I said, Where do we play next? They said Florida. I said, Okay, guys, practice Monday and Tuesday and we'll leave Tuesday to go to Florida. But this league is, it's hard. Hard games.

Q. You mentioned Adou's toughness. I know he got beat a couple times on defense. Made some mistakes. But does he have, for lack of a better term, a little bit of a longer leash because of those intangibles or is that a function of missing two guys?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, you're missing two guys and he had to wait his turn. And that's hard. Ugonna waiting his turn. Really hard.

How about Lance today? Lance was a big part of this game. And I loved the fact that the fans were going nuts for him. I mean, that's what we should be having. That. Not the other stuff.

So Adou's one of those guys. I had to leave him in because Antonio had two fouls. Then I played Antonio with two fouls a little bit and then I went back to him.

But Cason played 37 minutes. Chris played 30-whatever minutes. So we're playing a lot of minutes. But I'll tell you they never stopped fighting. They fought the whole time.

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