

# University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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Lexington, Kentucky, USA

## John Calipari

### Press Conference



Kentucky - 86, Auburn - 54

**Q. You guys have really been kind of in control of most of these games at some point or throughout and then you've talked about it kind of let the other team come back. Did this feel like, finally, I mean, obviously you're up 40, like dropping the hammer, a complete performance, I guess?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, having C.J. back gave us minutes. Now you may look and say, He only played six minutes. That's a lot of minutes for someone that's playing 40 minutes.

The other guy that they talked about, they said, Chris had foul trouble and you played Adou. How good did he play? I mean, he played good.

Difference for us was we made threes. When you go 0-11 from the three and still win the game you're pretty lucky. But we make threes we can stretch things out a little bit. And we made threes today.

We still rebound the ball, we defended great. We're getting better. The thing I talked about, like what areas can we get better at this time of the year. You're only going to get one percent better in certain areas. But confidence, individual confidence can really grow. And that is, you do it in practice, you get in the game and you perform. You have a ball playing.

But the biggest thing is you got to trust all your teammates are on the same page so that you can be a risk taker, you can make some plays, you can be aggressive because your teammates are behind you. And they also know and trust that whatever the game plan is, everybody's locked in. Our shoot-arounds right now are 30 minutes. 30. These dudes are locked in. Bang. And then we go.

But look, that's a good team. They got size. They got guard play. I think that the size of our guards probably bothered them a little bit. But they're good. I mean, they're a team that can score in bunches and can get you on

defense and they're good.

**Q. You've talked about Jacob making use of that great physical skill, the 40-inch vertical and all that this season. When do you think it started to click for him to have this kind of rebounding?**

JOHN CALIPARI: LSU. Was it the LSU game? Yeah. He started. But I just slapped him and said, I'm not letting you back up. Just know. Like, I'm on him in the game now because he'll like to try to take his foot off the gas and act hurt. And I'm like, Are you hurt? You need to come out? Your body language affects us.

And he is playing so well, I'm just saying, Why would you want to be that other guy? This guy, he's one of the best players in the country.

Oscar, can you see he's getting his confidence back? He was out, we were trying to make do.

Cason's getting better and better. Still has one or two screw ups. But I'm fine with it. Because he does so many other things.

**Q. How close do you feel all your guys are on the confidence level and the whole trusting each other. How close are you?**

JOHN CALIPARI: We're on that rise. And at this time of the year you're trying to have them empowered. They're calling plays in huddles now. Cason saying, Why don't we do this. Boom. The minute they say that to me I go, Let's do it. Because it's off my plate and now it's on their plate to make it work. And I want that.

Defensively the same. We talked about changing and they went, No, let us keep playing this way. Fine. Let's go.

So you want 'em empowered. You want 'em confident. But just as important you want 'em to have a ball playing. Even when it gets rough and the other team makes a run, you got to have a ball playing basketball. Especially this time of the year. Because you don't want it to end.

Refuse to lose. Doesn't mean you're winning every game.



It means your mentality of how you're playing. You never stop. The clock may run out on you. But you just keep coming. And these guys are embodying that right now.

**Q. Not to kind of maybe go back to the first question too much, but you have mentioned a lot about not letting the other team get back in games when you get these double-digit leads. Did you think today not letting that happen is a sign of growth and maturity of this team, especially heading into these final couple regular season games?**

JOHN CALIPARI: But we're up 25. It wasn't 10, 12.

**Q. No, but you were only up 15 there early in the second half. And Florida, they came back and made it interesting. They took the lead at halftime.**

JOHN CALIPARI: We've been showing 'em the tape. We've been watching. We said, Why this. Why that. So I got a very intelligent team. Smart team. And they're getting it. But you got to be confident.

You know what you got to make? Free throws. You know what you got to make? An open shot. That's a dagger. You know what you got to get? A tough rebound and throw it ahead and make that three. That's a dagger. And we kept running today. I mean, we didn't stop. We wanted this game to be fast. That's how we play.

Offensively, you know, I can't imagine we're not in the top 10 in the country offensively how we're playing. And they're getting it.

**Q. You talked about hitting shots, hitting threes. Antonio hit so many of those today, seemed to really get going. But it was just four, five games ago you mentioned there was a game you couldn't play him because of the way he was playing on defense.**

JOHN CALIPARI: It was Florida. What happened in the Florida game? He got beat how?

**Q. Back doors.**

JOHN CALIPARI: For layups. You know what he didn't do against Florida the second time? He did not get beat back door. And he looked at me and I looked at him and we both just smiled. Like, they were trying. And that's what I'm talking about, confidence defensively.

You think that I'm talking about just shooting the ball and just let it go. No. I'm talking about confidence rebounding the ball. Confidence on defense. Confidence flying up the floor even if you don't think you're going to get the ball.

That you're confident if you are open you're going to get it. You're never jogging. Confident that you're a playmaker and you're not going to charge or throw it away. Again, today we didn't have many open-court turnovers. They convert better than any team in the country if you turn it over, live ball turnovers. So we're getting better. A couple more. Yes?

**Q. After the South Carolina game and even the Georgia game, I mean it was assumed that the guys were pretty low. How different is the locker room the last week or so compared to those times?**

JOHN CALIPARI: You know, there's two things when you're coaching: One, you got to hold 'em accountable. Like, you got to -- no. You say no. You got to hold 'em accountable. But you're juggling balls because you also got to build 'em up. But if you just agree, Yeah, you're fine. Just keep, yeah, you know. Vanderbilt so you got to hold 'em accountable, challenge 'em. Get them to think in terms of getting better. And the whole thing -- all we talked about is winning today. Winning today's practice. We gave out awards every practice. We just stayed in the moment. They just told me -- I don't even -- I know we play Vanderbilt because they just told me next. I don't know who we're playing next. Now I know Vandy. That's all I know and that's what I'm focused on. So trying to get those guys to stay in the moment.

Then the other thing is, you know, what anybody is saying. You don't have to read it, look at it. I said it, people tried to talk us out of the NCAA tournament. They tried. They're out. They're done. They're awful. They're this. You play yourself in or play yourself out. And it's really never over when you have a tournament that has an automatic bid. So everybody in our league still has a chance to get in. But I just kept convincing 'em, you can't -- what they say has no affect on what we're about to do. And again, I always say, Is it their opinion or their hope? They giving you their opinion or their hope? Kind of know what it is. But go ahead. Last one.

**Q. The spike you had in offensive rebounding, how much of offensive rebounding is just pure effort?**

JOHN CALIPARI: It's angles, it's wedging. How about this: We -- there's things that are rated every game. One, sprints. You get graded. A, B, C, D, or F. Every time the ball changes defense to offense you're sprinting. We also grade offensive and defense rebound attempts. Offensive rebound attempts. Who do you think is the highest on our team? Oscar. Who is the second highest on our team? Chris. Wow. Because he attempts so much, he gets a chance to rebound. We also grade weak-side defense. So when the game ends, they are graded on every possession

they're in. Again, to hold 'em accountable. They're really listening and following game plans. We're not breaking down. Especially defensively where it was ugly for awhile. We're just getting better. I'm happy for these guys. And you know what else, I'm just so happy for our fans. That we're promoting and pushing. And I mean that building was packed. You don't think that has an impact on the game? It absolutely does have an impact on the game. And so now we go to Florida, what do you think they're yelling at the end of the game? Go Big Blue. Louder than their fans. And it's our fans on the road. And I'm just happy for the fans who were so patient and were so supportive.

I mean, and I'm saying this to everybody, you can stop sending me letters now and cards. I got a stack of 'em. Everybody, I'm fine. I'm good. I mean, it's, none of it -- I say it, I got bazooka holes in my body. You think a bullet or an arrow? It doesn't hit skin. I'm just trying to worry about them.

And if I felt bad -- you asked me about Georgia and South Carolina. I felt awful after those games. My first thought is, If I feel this way, how do my players feel. And then I got to go back and get out of my own self's way and say, Let me be about them. But they're coming together. They trust each other.

Now we got another tough game. I mean, Vandy's playing as well as anybody in our league. They are. So we'll have another tough game to play and hopefully we have the same kind of crowd. When is the game? Wednesday at 7? We'll see. One more. Let me go do radio, folks. Thank you.

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