

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Calbert Cheaney

Press Conference



Q. Calbert, as someone who grew up in Indiana, was recruited by Bob Knight and played for Bob Knight, I recognize the answer to this could probably go on for hours, but how would you explain to someone not just who he was as a coach but almost I guess as a persona or as a cultural force in this state in the 1980s, the 1990s, at the time that you were growing up and then playing for him?

CALBERT CHEANEY: Oh, larger than life. Everybody wanted to play for Coach Knight and play for their state back when I was growing up. To have an opportunity to play for the man and to be recruited by him, I think that's unbelievable. During that time, it was all about playing for your home state and playing for your home school and having Coach Knight coach you.

The dream came true for me, and I'm glad it happened.

Q. I've spoken to a lot of former Indiana players and assistant coaches over the years, and the one common theme is the loyalty that ex-players and ex-coaches showed to Coach Knight. When did you start to feel the magnetism of that loyalty yourself, and how has it kind of followed you through your life and your life experiences, some of the lessons that he imparted to you over his time?

CALBERT CHEANEY: It probably started -- obviously my freshman year was kind of rough because you're trying to get to understand how the man operates. He pushes you so hard, not so much the physical part but the mental part, trying to get you to understand how this game works and how to compete at a high level and how to be extremely prepared, and then once I finally got it -- it's amazing how much respect and admiration he has for you because you're trying to do what he wants you to do, and he knows that you want to win, and he knows that you want to compete at the highest level and perform at the highest level for him and for the university and for the program.

That's when I started to feel it. It got to the point to where all he had to do was tell me, hey, Cal, you're not playing at

your best right at this particular moment, you need to pick it up.

There were some times, too, when he went fire and brimstone on me sometimes, too, but that's just Coach. He wants to win really extremely badly, but he wants you to feel that way, too.

He was all about team and what it's all about to win as a team and accomplish the same goal. That's what's great about Coach.

Q. Is there a moment, whether it be a game or practice where Knight kind of really dove into some details and you as a player went, wow --

CALBERT CHEANEY: Freshman year, because with our motion offense, it was all conceptual. He would talk about, hey, if the big is up and if you're down, he's going to set a down screen for you; if he's down low at the post, he's going to set a back screen; if he's on the wing and you're at the top, he's going to set a flare screen for you. I'm over there just like smoke coming out of my ears because you're trying to understand that, and it's not like he throws you into it. He'll show you the concepts playing 2-on-2, 3-on-3, 4-on-4, but at the same time then you've got to try and make it work when you play 5-on-5.

Just stuff like that, and then the defensive concepts on how to be on our help and how we help on the weak side and all that stuff, it was just like, wow, how is this stuff going to work?

But then at the same time, you see it work. Once you understand it and see how it works, it works miracles.

I just think Coach is one of the smartest coaches I've ever been around, and I think what he taught back then was -- he was ahead of his time.

Q. Have you ever been able to figure out what about your personality and his personality meshed so well to allow you to become the player that you did?

CALBERT CHEANEY: My mother. So my mother, I would



always tell people that my mother was probably more of a disciplinarian than he was. It kind of made it a little bit easier.

But yeah, I always tried to be like -- I was one of those guys, I was very competitive, but at the same time if he yelled at me or told me something or said something to me, you're not doing such-and-such or such-and-such, okay, I'll show you; I'm going to show you. Then once I'd show him, he'll go over there, sit right down and shut up. That's the type of relationship we had.

I think he had that type of relationship with all of his players. Like you said, if you do what he asked you to do, like I said, he'll shut up.

Q. You kind of alluded to it a few times, but the approach that Bob Knight took, it seemed to be more of a teacher than a coach. The conversations I've had with either Pat Graham or Todd Leary or Brian Edmonds, everybody has their four years of notebooks where they took notes and all of that. How much of that just sticks with you and that you're able to use to?

CALBERT CHEANEY: Huge, huge. I still have my notebook up in my office right now. It's on the shelf.

It's all about teaching, teaching the concepts, how the game works. I think a lot of -- sometimes a lot of players, they don't understand how the game works. They just want the ball in their hands and they just want everybody to get out of the way, but you've got to know how the game works because you've got four other guys out there on the floor.

So he was very, very detailed in teaching us how to play on the offensive side of the ball and the defensive side of the ball, special situations, all that stuff, preparing for teams that came in here.

It got to the point, another thing that was -- in reference to preparing for teams, there's so much video involved and this certain play, this is what this player is going to do, and then it got to a certain point to where when you got out there on the floor and you saw the play, then call a certain play, you knew exactly what they were going to run because we were so prepared. I think that's what separated Coach from a lot of other coaches.

Q. Is there anything particular of Coach Knight's style or his persona that you have seen in yourself carry over as you've made your way to the sidelines at this point in your career now?

CALBERT CHEANEY: Yeah, just the competitiveness, being competitive, and sometimes to a certain degree I have to go fire and brimstone on guys just to get them to understand. But at the same time, you've got to give them that little tough love, but also at the same time, you've got to put your arm around them and coach that, as well. His idea of putting his arm around you was he'd hit you in the back of the head. He's got his National Championship ring, and he'd National Championship you to the back of the head and hurts, but that was his idea of love.

Yeah, just competitive fire every now and then that I show, and I just try to convey to the other guys, this is what you've got to do to win. You've got to have that competitive fire and competitive spirit in order to be successful.

Q. Coach Woodson talked about his impact off the court outside of basketball. What was maybe the No. 1 thing for you not even on the court but just the way --

CALBERT CHEANEY: That he does things for people that most people around in the public don't really see or realize or know. The one thing that he's going to be tough on you, he's going to push you, he's going to make you not like him sometimes, but at the end of the day, when you graduate and go off and do your own thing, he'll do anything for you. You pick up the phone and give him a call, he's going to pick it up and do whatever you need. That's just the type of person he's always been.

A lot of people didn't really see that, but there's a lot of people in this -- that he's touched a lot of lives in the time he was on this earth.

Q. Mike talked about his in recent years it was kind of bittersweet to have Bob there because he couldn't necessarily talk to him like he might have a couple years ago about coaching, about things he saw. Do you miss that, too? Are there times where you can think of as kind of this phase of your career where I would have loved his advice on this thing or looked to him for that?

CALBERT CHEANEY: Oh, without question, no doubt. Sometimes you can get stuck as a coach or you might get stuck in life. Sometimes it's good to have someone that's experienced what he's experienced, and that can help you along your way.

He's just like a mentor -- he's a big time mentor for me, not only just a coach. He's been there, done that, and sometimes I was able to pick up the phone and give him a call if I did have some trouble, but now in certain situations, I'm sure he's in a better place.

Obviously, yeah, you definitely miss out on the advice that he's able to give you.

Q. I asked Mike this, too, but we found out the news yesterday evening. When and how did you hear the news, and what's the last day been like for you since?

CALBERT CHEANEY: It was weird because I didn't hear it until after our practice yesterday. I started getting all these -- I got like a million texts that said, sorry to hear about Coach. I was like, what the heck. So then all of a sudden I just look and I put a call in, and I was like, wow, yeah. It kind of hit me kind of hard at first because obviously I know he was 83, but still, you still think that in the back of your mind he was taken too soon. But at the end of the day, that's life. Time is undefeated, and we're all going to be there at some point.

But I know that he lived a nice full life, and he had people around him that loved him. Like I said, he was one of the greatest coaches I've ever been around, and the world lost a great man yesterday.

Q. I know you and Coach Woodson and of course all the players that played under Bob Knight have your relationship with him, but what do you think it was about him that really garnered the respect from people that didn't play under him like you did?

CALBERT CHEANEY: Well, I mean, just his accomplishments, obviously what he's done on the basketball floor. Obviously when you're in business, any type of business, be it a sport, anything of that nature, you're always going to -- if you do your job well, people are going to respect that. I think he did his job really, really well, and people respected that.

I think that's one of the things that he's been able to do, and I think it's great. Like I said, you guys in your field, I'm sure you guys are the tops in your field. I've got a lot of respect for you because you're doing your jobs to the best of your ability. I think that's the impact Coach Knight has had on a lot of people.

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