

CBS Sports Classic: Kentucky vs UCLA

Saturday, December 17, 2022

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach John Calipari

Chris Livingston

Lance Ware

Press Conference



UCLA - 63, Kentucky - 53

Q. What do you think was working so well for you here tonight?

CHRIS LIVINGSTON: I just think I was being very patient with offense. Jump shots. But again to be around the paint and I got myself going with my jump shot and so forth.

Q. This is a big-time stage, national television. You're new to this kind of appeal. But what does it say about the faithful traveling still, playing in this environment away from the home atmosphere? How do you guys use that?

LANCE WARE: I think wherever we play, Kentucky is going to be there. When we were in London, it was like a home game. That's what comes with the Kentucky fan base. It's beautiful. They're all going to travel and support you.

Q. Lance, you had the (indiscernible) there at the end of the first half, start of the second half where you were playing with Oscar. What did you like about playing with him and playing in that situation today that allowed for so much success?

LANCE WARE: I think, when both me and Oscar are in the game, it's hard for teams to rebound the ball. Probably if that's going to be a thing, I'll probably find some offensive sets that we can still get some baskets. I liked it. It was cool being out there with Oscar.

Q. Lance, Cal's done a good job of getting players

from New Jersey, including yourself. Why do you think so many guys from Jersey are wanting to play for him?

LANCE WARE: Probably because guys like Michael Kidd-Gilchrist, him having success, and other guys obviously being here, like Isaiah Briscoe and people from Philly.

But through those guys, they're really close, and the guys all know each other and tell good things about it.

Q. Do you tell the other guys what it's like to play for them too?

LANCE WARE: Yeah, I think they appreciate it. Like Kareem could tell his brother what it's like on a day-to-day basis.

Q. You were pushing the tempo in the second half. And the last three or four minutes, it seemed like the offense (indiscernible). What did they do differently than in the first half?

CHRIS LIVINGSTON: Towards the end, we tried to really grind the game out, get into our sets, you know what I'm saying? To move the defense a lot more. Because late-game situations, it's winning time. You've got to grind it sometimes. Sometimes you've got to grind it and get the best shot possible.

LANCE WARE: Yeah, I think they started throwing everybody at Oscar. It was hard for them to get the ball, and we had to figure out something else.

Q. When you're double-teaming Oscar and sending so many bodies to him --

LANCE WARE: It was triple-teaming.

Q. And the outside shot isn't really falling, what can you do as an offense?

LANCE WARE: It's tough. Floaters.



CHRIS LIVINGSTON: Be aggressive getting into the room from the guard spots.

LANCE WARE: If you're not making shots, there's three people on him. It is what it is. Some go, some don't. We made some shots at the end of the first and end of the second half, but towards the end we didn't really make any shots.

Q. What made you stick with Lance at the point there going into the second half?

JOHN CALIPARI: Toughness. That's all we talked about, and that was the same with Chris. Just we needed toughness on the floor.

When they started bullying us a little bit, the game slipped, and when you got those other two in there, that was kind of negated.

I thought they played well, but you can't go 5 for 13 from the line, not in a game like this. You can't go four front end one-and-one, so really you're 5 for 17. You don't have to make every free-throw, but you can't go those numbers.

We miss so many open shots, it becomes demoralizing, and the crazy thing is we still could have won the game. They put five and six guys. They were throwing guys at Oscar. That's why I said, when they do that, you have got to make shots. We have good shooters. We're one of the better three-point shooting teams, and we missed.

We played fast. We did some of the stuff that we wanted to do. We still held the ball a little bit. But 18 turnovers, and most of it just rough play that we couldn't bust through, get open on a screen, on a dribble handoff.

But you've got to give UCLA credit. They made the plays they had to make. I thought we were going to win the game. I'm looking at it like, okay, we're in good shape. Let's just keep going. Then you make a couple errors, and then we took a couple bad shots down the stretch when it was a two bucket game.

Again, what it was, I'm going to take the easiest shot versus I'm going to make a play where I can get fouled. You know, I'm just going to take this shot. No. The mental -- the toughness that we need is what we're going to have to -- and again, there's one way to do it. You get in the game, and you perform, demonstrated performance.

But I'm disappointed. I mean, I'm disappointed that we lost, but I'm also disappointed in plays that I thought we could make and some of the turnovers that I just thought were not necessary.

Q. You mentioned the free throws have been an issue all year. Is it mechanical? Is it in their heads?

JOHN CALIPARI: We're not a bad free-throw shooting team. We were today. But mental toughness comes into play in all that. You've just got to be tough enough to know, I'm going to the line. I'm making these.

I told them prior to the game, you've got to play like you have nothing to lose. You can't play like you're -- wow, we can't -- no, you just, you play. And everybody that we play against plays like they have nothing to lose. So we've got to play that way.

We'll go back, and we'll get better. Like I said, the only way you can learn about your team mentally and physically is in games like this, where you just get physically beat and learn. Now it's either you learn you can play in this kind of game or you can't be in the game.

It's how you learn about your guys, and if they're honest with themselves, how they learn about themselves.

Q. What's your approach with C.J. right now when he's struggling to make shots? Also, if you don't make shots, you're not going to have rep time in games. How do you coach that?

JOHN CALIPARI: What happened today, and he was great about it, Chris was playing so well that at one point I wanted to put him in for Chris, and he said leave him in. That's a helluva teammate.

I haven't lost any faith in him. I just think this is going to play out over a period of time, and the guys that should be on the floor will be on there.

That's why my respect for Chris is off the charts and it's been because he's never stopped working in practice. Other guys were having the first opportunity, and now all of a sudden, he has the opportunity. He's not pouting. He just showed you what he was.

Had a couple plays, one-handed rebounds, which is a habit he has, which we needed those balls. But what he did to help us stay in the game and then get up, incredible.

Q. Oscar's inside, and they're sending double, triple teams after him.

JOHN CALIPARI: Missed four free throws, though. Understand he's a really good shooter. We ran an out of bounds play, he makes it. He missed three or four shots on the free throw, he does not miss those.

Again, he went to the line. He was 0 for 4. No way. Oscar is a really good free-throw shooter.

But I'll say this. That stuff is contagious. When you watch one guy miss and the next guy misses and you get up and it's in your mind, that's part of it.

Q. (Indiscernible) the SEC Conference might be the best conference in the country. What has to change?

JOHN CALIPARI: You have to get mentally and physically tougher. You have to. You're going to be in wars every game. For us it's figuring out, all right, how are we doing this, with which group, who is it?

I didn't put Daimion in in this game, but you look at it saying, okay, maybe he's another guy we try. I haven't lost any faith in the team. I'm disappointed. Right now, even without watching the tape, I'm disappointed. Seeing the numbers, 18 turnovers.

Do you understand we get 21 offensive rebounds against a good rebounding team and we still only scored -- that means you got the ball like a foot from the basket, and we didn't get balls in. So there's a lot of things that I would say like we're better than this. But we're going to have to show it.

Q. Why didn't Lance play for the final stretch of the game?

JOHN CALIPARI: Because I thought we needed a basket or two to get up to do something, and that's why I went with Lance. Lance made a bad miss, missed some shots down the stretch too. So that was just a call.

And Lance, like I said, here's another guy. I played him at four, and we worked on it this week because I said, You may be our four this game. So we worked on it, and he did great.

He had great practices, and he's excited. He just wants to play and fight and be a great teammate.

Q. Cal, Mick described this as an old-school Big East, he said bloodbath. Did you anticipate it being like that?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yes, I was mean for two days in practice and was really hard and kind of honest with them because I knew -- like we fought and had a chance to win. You've got to understand we missed every shot, every free-throw, 18 turnovers, and had a chance to win, because we fought. With the guys I put in there, we

fought.

But the way we played, that's a game you're trying to score 75, but you're going to have to make some shots, make a floater.

I'll tell you what, they made a bunch of floaters. We missed every one. I don't think we made one. Something we work on too. We'll get better, folks. We'll get better.

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