

# CBS Sports Classic: Kentucky vs St. John's

Saturday, December 20, 2025

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

State Farm Arena

## St. John's Red Storm Coach Rick Pitino Press Conference

Kentucky 78, St. John's 66

RICK PITINO: I congratulate UK for the great second half. I think a big difference is the play when Lowe comes in the game, they're a different basketball team. He makes people better. He is very tough to ver in pick-and-rolls.

But I think Mark did a brilliant thing. He came into the season thinking he had this great shooting team, and it's obvious that it's probably just an average shooting team, and he said I'll change the whole mindset. We're going to be a physical team. We're going to be a tough team, and they totally changed the personality of who they are.

I think that's a brilliant move by Mark. That's all he talks about, the physicality and toughness. I think he made a change, and the injury guys have come back. Makes them a much better basketball team.

We played a great defensive game in the first half. Disappointed that we keep getting dominated in the front court; on the backcourt especially last year we were one of the leading offensive rebounding teams in the country, and this year we're just not getting it done on the offensive glass.

I congratulate Kentucky on a terrific game, and we'll move on to Harvard in two days.

**Q. 2-4 for you guys against power conference teams. Are you disappointed in the non-conference?**

RICK PITINO: I'm disappointed in any loss, but all I wanted was to get it done. We have a decent basketball team. Nothing more than decent. We've got to take decent to good, and that means you've got to play two great halves defensively.

I think you can see that Jaland Lowe, him coming in -- we



don't have somebody coming in like him. That's our fault as a staff for not having a big time point guard that makes people better.

I will say that outside of the fact that he never blocks out, Ian jacks is improving, getting better and better. That's not his natural position, but he's doing a good job of getting better.

But that's a big factor with us right now, and that's our fault as a staff, not having a big-time physical point guard. It's something that we look at, but we've got to make sure that we do it with other players. But more so than that, I think our front court is -- we have a things called goes where in practice how many times 3, 4, and 5 go to the glass. We want our 4s and 5s to go 80 percent of the time, and last year we were about 70.

This year we're about 40 percent. We're not going to the offensive glass and getting missed shots back so we have to keep working on that.

So I'm not disappointed. It's not my job to be disappointed or elated. My job is tomorrow to make the team better.

**Q. What did you see from Jayden Quaintance for them and how he impacted the game?**

RICK PITINO: Well, obviously he's got a great reputation. He's long. I think their length really bothered us in the first half. But we did a really good job, sometimes with statistically what doesn't show up because you look at it and we didn't shoot real well.

But then you've got to also look at the fact that we took 32 free throws and got to the line. So that's part of offense as well that doesn't go into the shooting percentage. So that's one of the strengths of our team, is getting to the foul line and making our free throws.

**Q. Can you just talk about the emotion going into this game given your history with Mark and also the University of Kentucky?**

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RICK PITINO: You know, if this was at Rupp, I think I'd have a lot of emotion, but I didn't have any emotion at all.

I'm really proud of Mark. I think he's done a brilliant thing with changing the whole mindset of the team, let's be tough, let's be physical. It doesn't surprise me that he made some changes; that's why he's a Rhodes Scholar candidate.

**Q. You mentioned Lowe a couple times coming back in the second half. What's the biggest difference that he makes, especially on the offensive end?**

RICK PITINO: Well, he's very difficult to guard in a pick-and-roll, and he makes plays going to the rim like a Tiny Archibald. He can take the content and still make shots, still make plays. He's a really good pick-and-roll guy. They're a totally different basketball team when he's on the court.

**Q. Coach (indiscernible) only had two fast break points. Was it a point of emphasis to get fast break points, and what was it that caused you not to be able to --**

RICK PITINO: Well, we tried, but they did a good job of getting back.

**Q. You were kind of talking about the physicality of Kentucky. There was a little bit of foul trouble on you guys going into the second half there. Can you talk about Jayden Quaintance coming back, I know it was mentioned earlier, but not only that, but how it almost seemed that his presence kind of made an impact instantly. Can you talk about how that led to some foul trouble, the double tech there I believe at the end of the first half, and explain it or talk about that a little bit?**

RICK PITINO: I think he's a big-time basketball player. They're only going to get stronger with him and Lowe. But I think you all need to learn a little bit of a lesson as writers because you're expecting Kentucky to be this great basketball team with all those injuries. So you all need to learn a lesson because you can't be a great basketball team without two of your best players, with no point guard, no big men. So I think everybody really exaggerates one game or two games or three games. Kentucky got blown out and usually Kentucky doesn't get blown out of any game, okay.

But you have to look at it when they come back, two gigantic pieces. So I think they'll be a very good basketball team. They're going to have to keep playing smash mouth basketball and play like that physical team, and I give Mark

all the credit in the world because he's a big believer in finesse, big believer at shooting the three, and he says, look, hey, it's not working, let's change, man. So I give him an awful lot of credit.

I'll take one more, okay, guys, and get out of here.

**Q. Rick, the point guard situation for the team has kind of been a thing since before the regular season started. You started out by telling us you need a point guard for the type of offense that the guys ran.**

RICK PITINO: What would you like me to say? I'm waiting for Tiny Archibald to come back? That's what you have to do when you don't have one. You make a positive from a negative and say we've got to do it collectively as a team. You want me to just complain and get their confidence down? Is that what you're looking for?

**Q. No, I'm not looking --**

RICK PITINO: That's what it is. We don't have it, so we've got to make sure the other guys can bring it up, do the job. That's our fault in recruiting. We lost out on four different big-time point guards that we went after, and we've got to make the best of a situation by collectively other people handling the ball and bringing it up.

I wasn't saying that it was a rosy painting because of having no point guard. It's just that's what we have to do. So I'm not going to get negative and just say what we don't have. We expected Dylan Darling to be a backup and we lost all of our recruits at that position and gained at other positions.

Just got to make the best of it when that happens. It's like an injury. You have a key injury, Kentucky has a key injury to Lowe, and what do they have to do, they have to come back they become much stronger. We got to become much stronger. I can't do anything about the point guard spot, but we've got to do a better job at the backcourt, we can do a better job of executing and blocking out, because we gave up 16 so many times. Ian is getting better much, but he refuses to block out, refuses on switches, and that's costing us a little bit but he's getting much better in all the other areas.

I think as he keeps improving, if we can get some wins, we'll have ourselves a respectable point guard.

**Q. Do you think that the way this team responds to giving up a lead is something less than what you expect them to do?**

RICK PITINO: I think our front court, we beat them



physically a little bit tonight. We got in foul trouble and we just didn't have the numbers to keep up with them when we got in foul trouble.

But they're a great group of guys. I love them, completely love them. Are they a great team? No, they're not a great team. But we can be a good team, and we can get better and better and better. I don't pay attention to how everybody rates it. This is the problem with today's world is you've got eight new players. What can you do to make them better by the end of the year? Next year we'll have eight new players. You've just got to put the team together and see what happens.

But I think by the end of the year, we'll be a formidable good basketball team. Right now we're not, but I think by the end of the year we can become that.

I wish you all Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays. Great seeing all the faces. You know I pull for Mark and I wish them nothing but the best.

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