

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Arkansas vs Kansas

Thursday, March 20, 2025  
Providence, Rhode Island, USA  
Amica Mutual Pavilion

## Arkansas Razorbacks Coach John Calipari Jonas Aidoo Johnell Davis

Media Conference

Arkansas 79, Kansas 72

THE MODERATOR: Coach, when you're settled, thoughts on tonight's victory, thank you.

JOHN CALIPARI: Good win. Guttled it out. They went zone. We ended up shooting too many jumpers. They had to do some different things. Went a little triangle and 2, also. Screwed us up a little bit. The kids fought. Nelly makes a shot, makes a couple free throws. Jonas makes free throws. Took us three times to get it in. I don't care. We won. If it took us four, you know what we didn't do? We didn't turn it over. So it took our third out of bounds play to get it in. That's fine.

We learned some stuff today, didn't we, boys? I told them after. There's stuff going forward that's good for us. This was a good one. That was an NCAA tournament game, two teams battling it out, making shots, making plays and we got away from them at the very end.

TB was really good. How active is he? Jonas was really good. Nelly, Boogie for not playing what? How many months? He practiced without -- there was no contact now. We can't have contact because if someone gets hurt I'm down to five. So he practiced but there was no contact and he went in and did what he did today. I had to get on him a couple times in zone. He didn't want to shoot it so he put himself 42 feet out. Then you can't shoot it. But that'll be fine. We'll be able to show him on tape.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach. Gear questions towards athletes.



**Q. Jonas, you played against Hunter Dickinson in the past. Did you look back to the game you played against him in Tennessee last year?**

JONAS AIDOO: I knew it was going to be a big matchup from the jump, had to help the team out for sure.

**Q. For both you guys, you both start the season with injuries in pre-season. How rewarding is this given your ups and downs you had this season? Did you always believe that even in the struggles this moment was possible for y'all this year?**

JOHNELL DAVIS: Yeah, we believed in the moment. Coach always stayed on us, pushed us, even when we were down and he helped us get through everything.

**Q. Jonas, you got an answer for that?**

JONAS AIDOO: We definitely always have faith. All glory to God. I always give all my glory to Him. I'm just thankful we're finally picking up this time.

**Q. Jonas, you say that... what's allowed this group, the DNA of this team to stay in the fight and to be peaking at the right time?**

JONAS AIDOO: We all know we have something to prove. We went through a lot of adversity, injuries, missing players, let a couple games go. Starting 0-5 in the conference so, you know, just all those things. That helped us build our confidence, build our strength and get us ready mentally for the rest of the season.

THE MODERATOR: Any more questions for Johnell or Jonas?

**Q. That three pointer at the end, walk us through that possession. It was obviously a big moment that gave you that last bit of separation. What did you see and what did you feel after it hit?**

JOHN CALIPARI: What did you hear?

JOHNELL DAVIS: I heard the background say shoot it.

JOHN CALIPARI: I yelled at him, "shoot this ball!" I'm



sorry. (Laughter).

THE MODERATOR: If there are no further questions for student-athletes...

Thank you.

**Q. Obviously those two guys have had a lot of success in March, Final Four for Johnell and Elite Eight for Jonas. How much are you relying on those two to have success in this tournament?**

JOHN CALIPARI: We have to rely on everyone. When you're down in numbers, everyone's got to help you. That's where we are. Again, the second half, we didn't shoot it well. We didn't make threes, but we made the ones that mattered and we made free throws. Our man offense and the way we're moving the ball and what we're doing, I expected him to go zone and triangle and 2. I coached against him a bunch and he's done both. I thought we were prepared but we're a different team. The guy I usually have in the middle is Adou but he isn't here anymore. I tried Jonas or I tried TB, didn't like it. We tried to guard him there and we went to Jonas and putting TB on the baseline looked to be a better thing for us.

**Q. John, congrats on the win. Given all the injuries, not having a lot of depth with practice and getting a win like this against a coach like Bill, this experience over the past four, six, eight weeks, is it something even new for you this deep in your career that you haven't endured?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Every one of us, including me, had doubts and we all had to convince ourselves we're going to do this. I had a card I read every morning and every night before I went to bed, and it was I've been blessed throughout my life. Forget basketball. I have been blessed. I have a great attitude. I'm going to enjoy this journey and grow as a coach from it. I am going to make sure I keep an eye on my players, and let's write our own story, and in the end it says have faith. I read it in the morning and I read it when I walked my dog, which I do twice a day. I think he walks me, but I think I walk him but I think it's the other way. Before I go to bed. I have it with me here. To keep me in that frame of mind -- if I want them in that frame of mind, I have to be in that frame of mind.

How do you hold them accountable? How do you channel them yet still keep building them up and keep hugging them and loving them? A lot of individual meetings, a lot of that when they're throwing balls away and missing shots. Keep playing, you're fine. But for all of us, the first battle you have, including us coaches, is with yourself. That's the

first battle you have. You can't worry about anybody else. Battle yourself and get yourself in the right frame of mind, and I didn't want the albatross around my neck of my history of coaching. You're supposed to win every game. No, no, you're not. Your job is to be about those kids and wherever the program is at that time, your job is to keep picking them up and make them better and make them feel good about themselves.

So I did -- there are times I'm like, on my office wall, "be at peace". Where we are, be at peace. Don't worry about where I am in the past. I didn't have any bearing on what I do right now. The NCAA tournament, talking about wins, it doesn't matter. National titles, none of it matters. It's this team trying to get us better but it doesn't work unless you have good guys and we have a bunch of good guys.

D.J. Wagner is one of the nicest kids and so is Jonas. I told his mom he's one of the nicest kids I have ever coached. Johnell. Billy and Karter. If I knocked them through the crack, now we got four guys. Hard to play. Play a diamond zone, I guess.

**Q. Cal, your two guards, Boogie and D.J., how important were they? D.J., six assisted and one turnover. Boogie, did you have a feeling he could be in that closing lineup tonight?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, because I really believe in him. The last thing that's going to come is the shooting. He's running and he hasn't done that in a while. When you watched him shoot yesterday, making 75% of his shots, yeah, go run seven times and now make a shot. It's different for him. But he was two out of three getting to the rim. The other one I'll have to watch but they said there was no body contact, it was all ball on that one layup. Maybe it was, but, you know, and I also have faith he'll make free throws.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for your time, Coach. Good luck Saturday.

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