

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Arkansas vs St. John's

Saturday, March 22, 2025
Providence, Rhode Island, USA
Amica Mutual Pavilion

Arkansas Razorbacks
Coach John Calipari

Johnell Davis

Karter Knox

Billy Richmond, III

Media Conference

Arkansas 75, St. John's 66

THE MODERATOR: Coach Calipari, once you're settled, comments on today's victory. Thank you.

JOHN CALIPARI: You know, there are some games we played this year where the other team said that was a physical team and I told them and reminded them of that. I know St. John's is physical, too. The second thing we talked about at halftime is first five minutes of this half, we got to get them to call a time-out and these kids came out and executed, got some rebounds. Now, I don't know of any team that I've coached in a while had 28 offensive -- I take that back. Tennessee did. They had 28 offensive rebounds and we still won, which is crazy.

Rick did a great job with his team all year. If they made a few shots, they would probably beat us. We were fortunate to get out, but I'm proud of these guys and all of them here had to overcome stuff and they did. They did because they're good guys, they've been raised right and they knew they finally, not at the beginning of the year, that we absolutely need each other or we're going down together and they became one heartbeat. They figured out that if I worry more about the team and less about myself, man, I play better. It took time.

Karter, you were terrific today. Billy, Nelly. Good win.

Q. For each of you, John just said everyone on the team had to overcome something. When he says that, what's the first thing that comes to each of your minds



of what you had to overcome?

JOHNELL DAVIS: Just the ups and downs in the season that we had.

JOHN CALIPARI: How about falling off the cart, almost breaking your right wrist, being out three weeks probably. I will help them if they forget. That was a long time ago.

Q. Karter, Billy?

KARTER KNOX: Overcoming adversity. We had to fight to get here. It's a blessing that my guys right here, that we worked hard in practice and the gym.

JOHN CALIPARI: He played so bad early he figured out I better get in the gym more and I better start playing for us. One time he blew up in the locker room and I said, I'm happy that you're that way, you want to play that bad. How good is he? How about the short shot he made in that corner that stemmed the tide? How about the free throws, the rebounding? Karter played. I know you're talking to them, but I had to say that.

BILLY RICHMOND: Thanks, Coach.

But like they said, just facing adversity. We had a long up and down season. We all came together, put our egos to the side and became one heartbeat, like Coach said.

Q. That play where you sprinted to the baseline, can you just walk us through what you saw there and just how good does it feel to have -- you had an impact on a lot of wins this year, but to do it with your scoring season high 16 points tonight?

BILLY RICHMOND: That was just a sense of urgency, just seeing the open lane but seeing the big stop me. I just pulled up and took the shot. I knew I was confidence with.

Q. Johnell, you plaid with a lot of high-level guys, and to see the big plays that Billy and Karter are making, and Boogie as well as freshmen, what does that say about those guys?

JOHNELL DAVIS: The stuff we do at practice and stuff shows at game time.



Q. Billy, what's going through your emotions there when everyone comes up and puts towels on you and is celebrating around you during the interview? What are your emotions there and what's it like being a freshman playing so well on a stage like this? You didn't play like a freshman.

BILLY RICHMOND: The emotion is all love. It's a brotherhood over here. I got his back and he's got my back.

What was the other question? I just take it as a regular game.

JOHN CALIPARI: To him, that's how he is. Nothing fazes him.

Q. My question is for Johnell. What's this journey been like for you? Tough ending last year at FAU, you break your wrist, battle through in five and here you are with 18 yesterday, 15 today. What's that feeling like for you?

JOHNELL DAVIS: It's an amazing journey. (Inaudible) stayed the course and I came out.

Q. This is for Johnell and Karter. Coach just said it's Billy's DNA, he's unfazed by anything. How would you extend on that? Describe what this kid meant to this game and what he's like.

JOHNELL DAVIS: Just how hard he be fighting and the toughness he plays. The things he do not on the stat sheet but it shows up to the coaches and everyone else.

KARTER KNOX: Yeah, fearless, do everything on the floor. Great to have him on the team.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time. You can head on back. Thank you.

Questions for Coach Calipari?

JOHN CALIPARI: Take it. Take it. Take theirs, too. (Billy Richmond removing players' name tents.)

Q. John, you coached a lot of high-level freshman throughout your career and same question I had for Johnell. What do those three guys bring to your team to be able to step up in this level of a game?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, they're not afraid and they want to prove themselves. I don't believe any of them were all freshmen in our league. Is that true? I think they have a

little chip on their shoulder about that. They're talented. Billy just has a different mindset. If I turn it over, so what, he goes on to the next play. Karter and Boogie are still freshmen. They miss two, they end up missing five. The other side of Billy doing that, he'll turn it over some. Why did you try to do that? I thought I could do it. The lob we had late where D.J. wouldn't throw it, Billy would throw it. He may throw it over the backboard, but he would throw it.

They're fun to coach. I told him this is as rewarding a year as I have had based on how far we have come. I have told them a million times, you're not going to disappoint me, let's figure stuff out. Z was good today. We need Z to play. I need him on the floor some. Jonas, two fouls. I just saw we went 2 for 19 from the three and won? What in the world? Then I saw they were 2 for 22. Was it an ugly game? Or was it a game that was exciting? Like, both? An ugly exciting game. You know I don't care. It could be an ugly-ugly game and I'm happy we're moving on.

Q. Coach, you mentioned the Tennessee game where they had all those rebounds. I think back to that and how you were out-physicalled. Can you speak to the growth of the team, then and now?

JOHN CALIPARI: I tried to explain to them how it would be and they didn't listen, so we went into that game and got absolutely shellacked. One of their players, I believe, had more offensive rebounds than we had rebounds. It was so bad. That was another one I think I burned the tape. People get mad, oh, he burned the tape. Yeah, if I don't believe it's my team that I'm gonna watch, then why would I watch it? The South Carolina game, I'm not watching that tape. That's not my team. But I was able to tell them, if you don't become more physical, if you don't do this together, you're going to take a lot of these. And we did. We took some early.

But to be where we are, still playing and still fighting and having fun. I'm enjoying it. Like I said, I'm not going to let anything faze me in this. Here we are, let's have fun. I'm still holding them accountable, but I'm asking them for a lot of input, what do you see offensively? What do we need to be doing? Missed a lot of layups again today, but, again, they're the number one defensive team in the country, so...

Q. Just a question, we talk a lot about how this game builds character. Could you elaborate on what you were saying about your kids overcoming stuff? Just about the character of the team?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, if you really want to bust out, you have to take some knocks and then overcome them to know you can, because the whole career they're going to

have in basketball is going to be that. Can you overcome the bad spells? Can you be so confident and fall back on your training? If you can't, there's no one picking you up. You got to pick yourself up. The second piece of that is in life, they could say, well, we were down and losing. I was with these guys. We had guys in a dark place where they would look like that, but now they know I can be in a dark place like that and overcome it. I hope they also understand that saying that you can go fast alone but if you want to go far, you go with others. I think they now understand that we all got to do what we're supposed to do and we got to do this together. We can't be selfish trying to get our own. Let's play off one another, and they're doing it.

As we move forward, we're going to have to shoot the ball better. We just are. If we think we're going to advance going 2 for 19, I'm sorry, you're not. We'll see, though.

But Bill, and, again, how about my staff who's been great? They never wavered. At one point we were back and forth. I said, guys, stop. We can't trade anybody this is who we got. How do we get each of these guys better? What do we do? We went to work. Spent time individually. I had a lot of meetings. They were sitting on a couch, let me just put it that way. There was a lot of stuff they overcame and I keep reminding them how much you have overcome. You guys think winning and losing. These kids have a piano on their back. It's never been this way in all my years of coaching, because NIL, if a kid got money, it's just more weight and now the families are more involved than they've ever been, why? NIL. So now all of a sudden, they got the people around them, they got the piano on their back, they miss a shot now, social media tees off on you. Are you really looking at that stuff? For them to do what they did and then were still playing...

Like I said prior to the game, how about we give ourselves a chance to make some magic? Let's go fight like heck, play free and loose, whatever happens happens, but let's go see if we can create magic. And that's what I said before the game, and at halftime it was first five minutes. We all know they're a second-half playing team if you watched them. Like, the numbers are crazy what they do in the second half of games, so we were going to have to do some stuff and we made plays.

THE MODERATOR: One last quick one here in front, Coach.

Q. What does this game say about how freshmen can impact college basketball in today's day and age? Your freshmen had 37 points and 19 --

JOHN CALIPARI: I'm not changing how I do things. I'm

not going to take seven or eight freshmen, which I have done. I think it was 2015 we started five freshman in the National Championship game. That's done. That'll never happen again, but bringing guys in, developing talent, let them go through the wars, prepare them and if they leave after the year, I'm good. They're leaving anyway! Whether they're a junior or senior... eeee! But they've got to be good enough like these kids to help us win or I'm going to play who deserves to play.

We have a couple really good freshmen coming in. I'm hoping we get one more and then we have to get in the transfer portal and grab a couple of guys. I'm hoping we get a crew of these guys coming back, but we got to sit down with them. I got to have those talks. When is it open? The portal?

Q. Monday.

JOHN CALIPARI: When? This Monday?

THE MODERATOR: Don't look at me.

JOHN CALIPARI: Welcome to my world. Monday we're really preparing for a game and having individual meetings about are you coming back? If they put their name in the portal, they probably don't have an option to come back, but, you know, you care about the kids. At the end of the year, it's all about them. Whatever they choose. You want to go pro? You want to come back? You want to go somewhere else? It's their choice. I have always been that way, but it's getting harder to be that way. Thanks.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, coach. Good luck in San Francisco.

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