

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Arkansas vs Texas Tech



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Chase Center

Arkansas Razorbacks Coach John Calipari

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

JOHN CALIPARI: I'll probably answer a few of your questions. Adou practiced yesterday. Leg was bothering him today, so I didn't put him through anything. We'll see tomorrow. If we had eight to 10 minutes from him in case of foul trouble it would help. But we're fine.

Let me say for both he and Boogie, first of all, the players that stepped in, Trevon Brazile, took advantage, unbelievable; how D.J., how about it gave Billy a chance to play big minutes. They all took advantage. Karter took advantage.

But when Boogie comes back to me and says, "Coach, I can play, but I don't want to hurt this team." What? When I went to the players and said, Boogie thinks he can do this, they all said, Coach, we need him.

And it talks about the character because I know there had to be people in his ear, in his orbit saying why would you play again. You don't have to play. He's, like, I want to help my teammates.

Don't you want that guy on your team? That's part of being evaluated. Adou said the same, probably had people in his orbit: Why would you play? All of a sudden he said, Coach, I want to try this. Three years I've waited for this moment, and if I can do it, I'm going to try.

I said, fine, but if you're hurting at all, don't. We'll do this and we'll figure out if you'll be okay to go. If not -- Chance they tell me he's ready to play. I had to do tape work on Chance -- McMillian. He's one of their best players. Like, they really need another shooter. They really need one more shooter.

But he can play. Tough, rebounder, shoot the ball. Now

I've got to go back on tape and say let's really figure out who he is.

Both teams are going through the same kind of stuff. Did that answer? Can I leave now? (Laughter).

Q. How is the mindset for you different? You've been at this stage so much, No. 1, No. 2 seed who's expected to be here versus, how the is mindset for you?

JOHN CALIPARI: We approach the postseason the same. I've been the 10 seed. I've been the 8 seed. I've been other seeds.

Again, there's so many ways of doing this, including on the court. There's a lot of ways to do this and have success. So, for me, what I've done, I want this to be like regular season like nothing has changed. The board hasn't changed. What we do, our shoot-arounds don't change. Everything is the same so I want them to feel comfortable that this is no different.

And we're in a tournament. Last tournament was Kansas, Omaha, St. John's and us. This tournament is Maryland, Florida, Texas Tech and us. Don't worry about any other games. It's just you're in a four-man tournament. Let's worry about doing it here.

So, no, but I've been, we're not No. 1 every year. As a matter of fact, we went to the national championship game, I think we were an 8 seed, maybe a 9 seed. So --

Q. You've kind of embraced the history of the program. Since you've been involved, you were on the phone with Nolan Richardson after you guys advanced to this stage. Why has that been such an important part of things for you since you got the job?

JOHN CALIPARI: Because I've been around the game a long time and I really respect coaches whose shoulders we're standing on.

Coach Sutton, he treated me like family. I don't know if you remember, we go to play at Arkansas, he came in my locker room.

Coach Richardson, we had some great battles but always respectful. He knew that I was respectful to him and what he had done.

This program -- there was an eight- to 10-year period, maybe even longer than that, maybe a 15-year period, where they were one of five programs nationally.

All we're trying to do, let's stay together, let's get our people involved. Let's make sure we honor the coaches that were here and did what they did for this program, and let's make us one of those programs that has a chance to do special things.

Q. I wanted to ask about the support that you got and your program got from John Tyson after you arrived. When you arrived the roster was a bit like a bare cupboard you had to rebuild from scratch. How much did the financial support that this program received from boosters like John Tyson help you get to this point and build a team capable of getting to this?

JOHN CALIPARI: I don't know if you know, the little postage stamp corner that we live in with Walmarts and the J.B. Hunts and the Tysons, and I could go on and on, the support for the university is off the charts. The pride in the university is off the charts.

John Tyson and I have been friends for 25 years. Every time we came to play Arkansas, we either had dinner the night before -- and publicly -- and/or I walked in the building and 20,000 people there and first thing I did is went over and gave him a hug, which he wanted me to do to let people know he and I were friends.

I'll throw another name. John L. Hunt. They're friends and they're supporters. John is my friend, but they've all helped the university. They've helped the basketball program. I'm going to be honest, they've helped the football program. They've helped the baseball -- I don't know if you know our baseball team is one of the best in the country. And when you see their facilities, you say, what. When you see the football facilities, you say what.

Well, that's not state dollars; that's people like those that you're talking about that are involved and want to be involved and want to help.

And we've got Warren Stephens. These people -- and Jerry Jones, they take unbelievable pride in their state, and I should say "our" state. And in that postage stamp little corner, which is just a different world, Springdale and Rogers and Bentonville and Fayetteville -- and that little area is neat.

Q. You just had a really good defensive game against RJ Luis. Now you face JT Toppin. What makes him tough to guard, and is there anything you can take from how you defended RJ and apply it to this game?

JOHN CALIPARI: They're two different players. I'll say it again, Texas Tech, well coached. They can beat you inside or outside, shooting 3s, posting the ball, throwing it to 15 feet, backing you down, making you make decisions.

The biggest thing with Toppin, he's a great passer. Not only do you talk about scoring, when you try to do different things, he can really pass.

I'll say this, there's a reason we're the underdog in this game. They're very, very good. But it's a different deal covering this team than, whether it be Kansas or St. John's.

Q. I wanted to ask about the "They forgot the nails" line -- that's something that Arkansas fans have come to identify with. Where did that come from? Is that off the cuff? Can you kind of walk us through where that inspiration kind of came from?

JOHN CALIPARI: No, it's kind of off-the-cuff. And I wanted to just say I know you threw us in the coffin and then it was just -- but we kicked it open. And, well, then they forgot the nails.

But I'm not the first guy to ever talk about they threw us in the coffin. There's been other guys that have used that. Again, when you're around a little time, there's stuff like that that someone says, and I maybe should give credit -- if I remember right, I'm trying -- Bill Rafferty -- Bill Rafferty talked about it with Seton Hall. May have come out of a casket. I refuse to do that. That's not good luck.

But he came out of the casket on his TV show and said, "We ain't dead yet!" But he's crazy. I'm not that crazy.

Q. Five years ago you came to Lubbock and were real complimentary of the fan base and the --

JOHN CALIPARI: Crazy, crazy. They were intense. There were thousands of them. Half the building was students, if I'm not mistaken. It was an unbelievable environment. The facilities, but I came down when Coach Knight was there. And I came in, when Coach Knight was there, to talk to him about the dribble-drive and what he thought of it, because his was motion and screening, and this was wide open, downhill running, touch the lane.

He gave me two great pieces of advice. There's got to be time when the ball stops. So you can, boop, boop, boop,

but the ball stops, and make sure you can start again. And it changed how we did it.

And he also said start some of it with pick and roll. So I was down there. He took me to a place to eat, which was a Chinese place that he used to eat at. He had like a bowl of butter and he was dipping -- I'm like, oh, disgusting -- but, yeah.

But you know what was great? He had me in his car and it was going neet, neet, neet, neet. What the hell was that? He left the seatbelt it ran out of juice to yell, put your seatbelt on.

But I've been down there a few different times. I'm a fan of Texas Tech, what they do, how they do it, their fans. It was nuts that night we played. I remember we made a shot to take it to overtime, I think. And if I'm remembering right, it was Immanuel Quickley in the corner, made a 3 to take it to overtime.

Q. Your thoughts now on Grant McCasland and the problems that the Red Raiders can pose for you?

JOHN CALIPARI: I'm watching tape and I say, in that league, to have that record, to go on the road and win the games he's won, that team, he's got them playing together and for each other.

We can play really fast, but we can also grind it if we had to. We could slow the game down, which we'll do at times.

They can shoot the 3 or, if you try to take that away, they can post it. And they play that way. And they'll figure out where there's an advantage and they go right after it. He's done a great job. He really has.

It's going to be a really hard game for us. But you know what? My kids, they've come through the fire. And my guess is other than a fan of Arkansas, no one is picking us to win the game. But the great news in this tournament, you've got to play the games. Gotta play them.

And so we'll see. And I'll tell the kids, I'm going to do my best for 40 minutes to give you everything I have. Sometimes that's a good thing. Sometimes I'm not as good. But we'll see.

Q. You talked a lot about how rewarding this season has been for you and how it might be the most rewarding of your career. For you personally and for the team to have made it to the second weekend and potentially beyond, how much does that kind of add to that reward?

JOHN CALIPARI: The only people that know what we went through is us. The only people that know the individuals and what they had to go through is us.

To know that every player on this team had to overcome something -- and they'll come up and say, when we lost five games -- I'm, like, right. What about when you were in my office in tears? What about that? Well, I don't remember. Oh, I remember.

So they have been through so much, that to see smiles on their faces -- like, there's one guy, I said I'm just happy you're smiling. I looked at him for two weeks, he's like -- and I'm trying to tell him, it's not life and death, because if you play it that way you die a lot. It's not life and death. If you want to play that way, all right, it's hard.

But for them to do what -- we were 0-5. We were 1-6 and had two road games that we weren't going to win either game. And all of a sudden this team starts to right the ship.

I'll come back to D.J. stepped up and took on whatever you need me to do, Coach. Billy stepped up. Karter stepped up. Nelly started being who we wanted him to be. Jonas finally. Did anybody think Jonas would play this week three weeks ago, four weeks ago? No. If you say you did, you're crazy. And now all of sudden he's playing. And then TB doing what he's doing.

So the rewarding thing for a coach is seeing your kids smile and knowing where I always had to say, I believe in you and there's nothing you can do that disappoints me. So just go play. I don't even have to say that anymore. I believe -- we believe, too, Coach. That's a big change from where we were.

Q. You mentioned some emotions there. I know not only your team had them, but your wife and your daughter had them on the sideline.

JOHN CALIPARI: Megan.

Q. What was that embrace like after the win last week in Providence?

JOHN CALIPARI: I heard that Megan was losing her mind in the seats. Somebody told me about it. And then they were saying a lot of stuff, that Ellen cried. What people have to understand, when the coach is going through something, so is his wife and his kids and -- you want to attack a coach, the wife and the kids take it personal.

When you try to be mean and nasty and just have an agenda what you want to do, those kids and that wife,



they're watching that, too.

So I think you got to see it raw with my wife and my daughter. But I'm also going to tell you, don't mess with my daughters because they'll come back right at you with teeth and feet, if you know my daughters. My son tries to stay under the radar. He's doing a great job on my staff, by the way.

And Ellen, she takes it hard. I mean, she and I have been together 39 years. We were married when we were 12. (Laughter). But we've been together.

I mean, she's been an unbelievable rock. She's the mother for these kids. If they're not over at my house once a week, she's saying where are the kids. She gives them all chocolate and fruit roll-ups, and they're in a bowl that they can take. She makes cupcakes for them every birthday. I shouldn't say cupcakes, brownies.

And the former players have called back on their birthday. If I wish them a happy birthday, she's sending them brownies. Think about that; the kid is 50 years old and he wants brownies on his birthday.

I know you look at this and, well, you're high profile, you take it, not only my family, everybody that's coaching, their families.

But I'm happy for her. There was a time we were 0-5 and I apologized to my wife for putting her through this. I apologized. She said, no, you're going to do fine. I'll be fine.

But I also apologized to the AD, Hunter Yurachek. I apologized to John Tyson. You got me to do this. I apologize. I didn't think we'd be 0-5.

But you know what? I think if you are trying to do the right thing and you stay focused on kids, it usually turns out okay. Sometimes not in that one year, but over a period of time, you're trying to do right by the kids, it usually plays out pretty good.

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