

# University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Saturday, Dec. 12 2015

## John Calipari

### Postgame

Kentucky - 72, ASU - 58

**Q. When Skal goes 0-0 and you're able to bring Marcus in and him give you that --**

JOHN CALIPARI: Marcus and Alex, and you saw without Alex what happened. When Alex – when they told me knee, I was literally physically ill to my stomach for him. But now you're playing guys that, like at UCLA, they're just not ready to play. They're not ready to get those kind of minutes. You can spot them in, throw them in, let them take a 3, but you can't play them long minutes. And if you have to, you're not winning.

I thought we played better defense in the second half. It wasn't a pretty game, but you see if we make 3s, we're 5 for 10 in the second half. And if you go back and look, they were the same open looks in the first half that we went 1 for 11, and the second half you're 5 for 10, but you saw the difference.

I'm not worried about it. The only thing I'm telling these guys, I want Jamal and Tyler prepared to shoot a 3 every single time, and if they crowd you, then you've got to drive it. If they don't crowd you, then you're looking to shoot.

**Q. Obviously it wasn't pretty for much of the game, but midway through the second half, what was the difference, because it looked like --**

JOHN CALIPARI: You made shots. You made three 3s and all of a sudden you look up, you're up 13-14, and then they -- they're a better team, and I haven't heard what Bobby (Hurley) said, but they didn't play as well as I've seen them play on TV. They went to Creighton and won. They beat Texas A&M. They were up 25 on Texas A&M. They beat North Carolina State. They had Marquette beat. They were up 10; they should have won the game.

They didn't play particularly well in the second half, and hopefully some of that was us, but I walked in at halftime, and I would like to have said, 'OK, we shoot 30 percent in the first half and we're up one. That's a good thing. But it wasn't because we got out-roughed and we got pushed around again.

We just have a long way to go. I mean, we really do, and Skal's thing, again, what were the fouls? Were they like hard fouls? No, they were fouls because he doesn't want to bend. He wants to use his hands. See, if you bend, I'm going to tell you what happens. Like you people all stand and bend. Go ahead and bend for a minute. Go ahead, bend. Now stay down there for a minute. You know what happens? You don't want to stay down there. I'd rather stand up and push. It's easier. And this is all a process, and he's got to accept, OK, now there's no question I

can't play this way and play and stay in games.

But this is a hard process. And the other side of it, I told him after the game, some of the guys, I mean, I was hard on some of the guys. But let me say this: We're going to go on the road in the SEC, and they have tents outside of every building we play because their students were there a week waiting on those tickets. What, do you think it's going to be easy? If you can't take me, a guy that loves you and is about you personally, you picked the wrong school.

This thing here is -- this is an animal, and so -- and I understand, you can tell me they're 18- and 19-year-olds and they're fragile and all this. This is a tough place to be fragile, as a player, as a coach, as an administrator, as a coach in any sport.

**Q. As you say, you're looking for those seventh and eighth guys in the rotation. Did Derek kind of make another case for that today?**

JOHN CALIPARI: He played better. I thought he did some good things. He passed up on a jumper that I absolutely did a backflip on the sideline. You don't have to make them but you've got to shoot them, and you can't miss them all. Like the one he hit bounced three times, hit the light, went off the top of the board, almost rolled behind and fell in. That's OK, it went in. Now the next one you've got to shoot.

Like I said, getting Charles Matthews to play the way he has to play for us to win and what he's got to do, I mean, we didn't rebound. I mean, we're one of those teams that a guy like Charles has got to go in; the one thing you know he's going to do is defensive rebound. Then I can leave him on the court. It doesn't matter what he does. But when you're not rebounding and you're out there, then it becomes a little tougher.

And we've got great kids. We've got talented kids. We've got great kids. They are so young. They don't know what it means to fight. They just don't.

**Q. You've talked before about the normal progression that's not necessarily normal here. With Marcus Lee, what is he now that he wasn't for you those first two years? What do you see?**

JOHN CALIPARI: He's more confident. There's nothing that I say that rattles him or Alex. Like, I'm on those two as much as I'm on the other guys, but they look at me and they say, "I've got you," and it has no effect what I say. I try to tell these guys, being Italian, I'm loud and I'm demonstrative. "Get that ball!" "I've got you." And then other guys, "Get that ball!" "Oh, my God, he yelled at me." Now, I could say it another way. "Could you please get that ball?"

**Q. You could try it.**

JOHN CALIPARI: I have tried it, to be honest with you, and the guy says, "OK."

**Q. Are you worried about Skal's confidence? Where he's at confidence-wise?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Somewhat, but I'll be honest with you: To do what these kids want to do, this is all a great thing that he's got to work through, and it's the first time in his life. You understand he came from Haiti. He played basketball for a year and a half and then he played church league

for two years. He's never been through any of this. This is all new to him.

Now, he played in a couple games that were more like pickup games. He made some jumpers. He ran up and down. And now there were no men. See, he's playing against men now. The kid he went against was a senior and just bulldozed him, and he couldn't play against a man. Well, this is all part of it.

Isaiah Briscoe, the way he's shooting the ball at the foul line, it's great for him. He'll figure it out. You didn't shoot 35 percent in high school; you shot 72 percent. How in the world are you shooting 35 percent? Figure it out. Are you just doing this so that you can play in the rec league in four years and five years, or are you trying to do something special with your life and yourself? Figure it out.

I kept telling -- a will to win. Part of that is getting in tough times and working through them. They're going to have to do it. Dom today didn't play particularly well. Well, tough it out. Let's go.

I just sent all of them a text, every player on the team, that there are a lot of times for you to make it you need somebody to believe in you more than you believe in yourself, and I sent that text to them, and I said, "And I believe in you. Time to ball." Sent it to every kid. I want them to know I believe in each one of these kids. I wouldn't have recruited them here if I didn't.

We're just -- we're the most inexperienced team in the country, and it shows. I mean, we could lose the next three, next five, next -- I mean, at halftime did you all think, if they don't get Alex back, they have no chance of winning this game? Raise your hand. Is anybody with me on that? Then I saw him walking out at halftime. I said, "Are you going to play?" He says, "Yeah I'm going to" -- I'm like, wow. And then I said, OK, we can do this.

**Q. Did you extend your defense out a little more in the second half or were you just more aggressive defensively?**

JOHN CALIPARI: No, we were playing how we always play, but what we were trying to do was get to more of a random offense, and the problem is our guards are holding the balls too long. As you bring it up, if you're going to go random while the defense is spread, it's got to go pass, pass and then start playing. And we were going dribble, dribble, dribble, dribble, dribble, post; dribble, dribble, dribble, dribble, throw it now. Too late. And that's what I was telling our guards: Get rid of it. And then when it comes back to you, pass, pass, drive, it's back, make plays.

This game is not easy. A lot of basketball is mental. A lot of basketball, it is physical, and a lack of physical play then ends up turning into mental toughness then starts to suffer.

So here we are, we traveled all over the country. We were in Chicago, we were in Miami, we were in LA, we're on our way to New York. We lost one game without Marcus Lee, and we're hanging our heads. That's Kentucky. That's what it is here.

**Q. Granted that it's a process, but is it typical that you can get a guy to bend and become**

### **tough in maybe three months?**

JOHN CALIPARI: I have done it, but it's not me doing it. It's them doing it. And in most cases, they have to accept, I've hit rock bottom. You've got to accept that. OK.

I'm going to say it again: Would you rather get down in a stance and talk and bounce, or would you rather stand up and just try to put hands on people? So you have to accept that that will not work anymore.

I tell a lot of these kids, the freshmen that I bring in here, what got you here may not get you there. What I mean by that is where you could bully, where you could just outrun, where you could play sloppy, where you could be an inefficient volume shooter, I'll take 40 shots and get 25, all that stuff may have helped you get here where we watched you, but it's not what's going to get you to that next step of your career where you're the best version of you.

You know, I love Skal. Skal is going to be good. If you think it's tough on you to watch it, think about, I'm watching it, too. And I want so bad for him to play well. We were running plays for him to shoot jumpers later and he wouldn't shoot them.

Now we've got a great -- the kids got two days off. They've got the rest of today, and they've got tomorrow, and then we start up Monday. Monday, Tuesday, individual work on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday practice here, travel to New York, play Ohio State, then go back, we get out of there for Christmas. Everybody is traveling from New York home. We'll spend three days at home and then come back and get ready.

It's a great time this week. They've got finals. Shift your thinking. But I'll have individual meetings and we'll do our thing.

But again, I'm going to say this: Arizona State, Bobby has done a great job getting these kids to battle and fight and try to figure out how they've got to play. I think they're going to be fine.

### **Q. Briscoe has evolved into it looks like a go-to guy. Can you speak to him buying into being that defensive giant that you said he could be and his not allowing his free-throw struggles to interfere with the rest of his game?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, it is affecting the rest of his game, but I will tell you he had four rebounds, too. Tyler Ulis had five rebounds. See, not only is he defending, he's going and getting balls because, again, we have other guys that are struggling to go get balls where you can't win then, and he's taken that on.

You know, again, I'm not -- it's just like our 3-point shooting. I'm not worried about his free-throw shooting. I'm really not. I mean, I watched him play high school ball. I saw him make 9 out of 10 free throws, but this is a tough deal coming here, and the laser is right on your forehead. It's right there. And these kids are learning, but what a great experience playing a physical team, playing a senior-laden team. Having happened to us what happened at UCLA, it's all learning.

The thing here, and I'll saying it again, coaching in this program, it's about March. It's about getting your team right so that you can make a run in March. That's what this all is.

Now, last year spoiled all of you and it spoiled me, so the beginning of the year you start fighting this a little bit. This is what it is. Here's where we are, let's try to get better.

Alright, now I've got to go because I've got to do this radio fast because I've got to go to a high school game sweaty in this suit, OK? Thanks, guys.

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