

March 14, 2015



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AN INTERVIEW WITH:

KENTUCKY

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

COACH CALIPARI: I liked how Andrew and Tyler ran the game offense efficiency was pretty good. Willie was the best version of himself. That's what we're striving for. Hard to do that every night out. But he has that ability. It's just hard. I don't want him to feel there's an expectation he has to be that good every night, but strive to be that good.

The good news with this team, if he's not, or Andrew's not, we're still okay.

But it was a good game, a hard fought game, and we played pretty well.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for the student-athletes, please.

Q. Andrew, what has this whole experience been like without Alex being able to participate due to the injury?

ANDREW HARRISON: It's been tough. It was tough in the beginning, but the way his personality is, he's always engaged with all the players on the team and stuff like that. He's not playing, but he definitely contributes to the team.

Q. Willie, what felt different for you today? What were you trying to do? It seemed like you were more aggressive out there.

WILLIE CAULEY-STEIN: Just being engaged and playing with a lot of energy. It started on the defensive end and just carried over to the offensive end.

So, I think that's what I was doing in the beginning of the year was just making sure, Look, I'm going to lock down on defense and then if offense happens, then it happens. Today it just happened. So that's kind of my game plan going into the rest of these games.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse you to the locker room and take questions for coach.

Q. Obviously a lot of success this season, but what has it been like for you without Alex and all the success you've been able to have?

COACH CALIPARI: It was hard. When he first got injured, my son had the same injury, so I know what that's about. To watch him and see him and see him in our practices and I know it's killing him not to be a part of this, but he is a part of this. He really is.

As we go forward, these guys know it's been a tough time for him. But they're great to him. I mean, these guys are good to each other, they really are. We got a great group of kids.

Q. You guys obviously came here to win, but I know you came here to do other things to prepare yourselves for the tournament. What from this game do you take away as a positive development for next week?

COACH CALIPARI: Well, what we used in this game, we wanted to make sure Harrell was not the guy to hurt us. I told our guys prior to the game, I said, Let's look at this as a NCAA tournament game and they got a guy that can go for 40. We're going to make sure that we make that tough.

Then we made a decision to let Willie guard him. I know here's a seven-foot fleet footed long-armed guy guarding you and you say, What did I do? Why is he guarding me? And the kid, he went 1-12. Now he shot a bunch of free throws and got fouled because he kept coming at the rim,

but it was something for us to see we can do this. They have a guy that's hurting us, Willie, you'll guard him. That was good for us.

Q. You guys really struggled to get the ball inside to the post at times. Karl was frustrated by that visibly. Were you at all frustrated by that, just your ability to even get touches on the block?

COACH CALIPARI: No. What they did was they were double-teaming. Now what I was disappointed in, there are times as the ball moved, they moved quicker than our big guys to fight for the position. Either we weren't down or something. But when we were down, we got it in there.

But they double-teamed and our kids did exactly what they should have done. They kicked it out for threes and spun the ball for a drive and lobs. They did what they were supposed to.

Look, if you're looking at our team and you say, OKAY, we got to take away something, let's take away the post, that's what they did today. We scored 91. They took away the post.

Karl Towns goes 0-1, but he gets eight points and six rebounds. Now the only reason he didn't play more, he got in foul trouble. Did that to himself.

Q. Now you are into the final tomorrow. Possibly looking at a quick turnaround potentially Thursday in Louisville. How do you approach this trying to play Sunday and maybe look ahead?

COACH CALIPARI: Well, Willie played a lot of minutes today. The other guys played 25 minutes. So they're playing a little bit more than half a game. We're not shooting around because these are noon games. We'll be fine.

This game tomorrow, again, I keep saying before every game, Let's just each of you think about being your best version of you. What do we look like when we're a really good team?

We're a defensive team. That's who we are. We create good shots. We have low turnovers. Again today seven turnovers, 10 turnovers. We're a low turnover team.

Let's just be the best version of us. If that's not good enough, what are you going to do? It's not best-of-five now. This stuff is all now one game shot, and you don't know what someone's going to do.

I'll live with the results if we're at our best, if we have high energy, if we're creating. Maybe we have a bad shooting day. You don't know how

this stuff plays out. I want them just focused on being at your best. And that's what I'm telling them.

Q. Have you ever sensed at any point this season that your players have gotten cocky or overconfident with all their success, and if you did, how would you have handled it?

COACH CALIPARI: I don't think they have. But if you watch me coach, you know, you don't have a whole lot of time to act that way. I told them after, I know some of you are mad at me, you go to the room and you cuss me, I know what you do.

And they say, Man, at least you know we do.

But I said, My job is to get you to be your best and I'm not settling for less than that. If you're in there you're not focused, you're not fighting, you're not talking, I'm going to say something.

And very rarely am I talking offense, very rarely. Sprinting the floor. This team here, it's been funny, because the veterans have fed off the young kids and the young kids have fed off the veterans, if you know what I'm saying. They just have complemented each other. It's not like I'm playing all young guys and the veteran guys.

Again, after the game, because we have guys answering back right now, mumbling under their breath, I got the fifth youngest team in the country. We're going to go into the NCAA tournament with the youngest team in the country. They're 18- and 19-year-olds. They're going to talk under their breath. Oh, who does he think he is saying that to me? That's what they're going to do.

I looked at them after the game and said, Sometimes I forget you're 18. You act about 16, but you are 18 or 19.

But I do have good kids. I really do.

Q. Bruce said that when he was at Tennessee you guys had great teams, but he could always find a little sliver of hope to scheme against you guys. He says now they have nothing. He can't find anything. In your mind, do you think this is the most complete team that you've had in every phase?

COACH CALIPARI: It's the deepest team I've had. I've had some really good defensive teams, like really, really good. This team is good, but it's just deeper than any team I've had.

Normally the best teams I've played, I

played six guys. That's what we played. It's part of the reason that we couldn't win every game. Because there was going to be a game where when you're playing six, two or three are going to struggle. You're just going to have a bad night.

When you're playing nine guys, you can really shuffle. And you watched today like I'm playing Trey at some four, which is what his natural position is. He's played a three for us, which is making him guard guards. It's going to be so beneficial to him going forward.

But when you see him as a four, you're like, Why aren't you playing him at four? Because Willie's a four. Why don't you play Willie at five, because Karl's the five. And you still got Dakari out there.

So, we're trying to shuffle them, but, to be honest, I've had some really good teams. I mean, my '95 team at UMASS was a really good team, Marcus Camby, Edgar Padilla, Carmelo Tavieso Danta Bright, Dana Dingle, Tyrone Weeks, that team, six of them I played, was a really, really good team.

This is a really good team. Really good team. Andrew and Aaron have played so well. I mean, they have taken us to another level, and I knew they would. It just took them time.

Andrew, he's got so much confidence that he's playing with. He's now in the attack mode. If he doesn't attack, I take him out. You're not going to stand there with the ball, you're going to either attack or score or shoot it, make a pass, make plays. That's who you are. He's 6'6". He's fast. He's athletic. He's just getting better.

Aaron's not settling for as many threes. So now you got a guy that's shooting 70 percent from the 2-point line like pull-ups and runners and that stuff. That's what he does.

But Willie, Willie was what you saw today. That's Willie when you say, Wow. I like what he said. It's all defense.

And then when I'm not like maybe putting him on that guy and making him play like a guard helped him, because that's what he had to do. He had to get down in a stance and play. And he played well.

Q. Any thought that even with not doing a morning shoot-around with these afternoon games, that it might be nice to have Sunday off preparing for the NCAA tournament, play the title game today?

COACH CALIPARI: Obviously that would be the best thing. But it's above my pay grade to

make that decision. So if we have to play on Sunday, we'll play on Sunday. That's fine. We're going to be able to get back to my house, to have our players and the media -- well most of the media, some media I don't invite, but at my house as we go through this, so...

I couldn't help myself. I am so sorry.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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