

March 15, 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: Good, hard fought game. Really proud of Willie and the twins and how they played. Proud that Karl got in foul trouble, yet finished the game and helped us create a gap.

Arkansas's a ranked team. Talking about a Top-20 team. We kind of did our thing. So proud of our guys.

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

Q. For both players, can you talk about, obviously you got a lot more to do, but just getting through this tournament and doing it in such dominant fashion.

WILLIE CAULEY-STEIN: A lot of it is just staying the course and staying what we have been doing the whole year and continue to keep a fight and not get bored of what we're doing.

AARON HARRISON: Really just got to stay focused and stay hungry:

Q. For both players, perfect up to this point. Is there any extra added pressure knowing that if you do lose a game beyond here, then this season is over for y'all?

WILLIE CAULEY-STEIN: Regardless if we were perfect or not, it's still we're only guaranteed one game. So it's really the slate is clean, whether we're 34-0 or got five losses, we still from here on out, you're 0-0. You got to take it one game at a time.

AARON HARRISON: Yeah, again, just like Willie said, every team's undefeated now and every team's perfect now. So this is when it starts to count.

Q. I noticed on Twitter that didn't bother to cut down the nets, sent somebody else out to cut them. Just double checking. So no need to get those at this point?

WILLIE CAULEY-STEIN: Those aren't the nets we're really looking to cut down. It was just a milestone. It's part of the process for us winning and everything, but we're looking for something bigger. We're looking to cut down a couple more nets in the tournament.

AARON HARRISON: Exactly what Willie said. We're looking ahead and we're getting ready for the tournament, so...

Q. For both the players, talk about the fact that both of you came back to play another year and the benefit that you reaped from coming back and what that's done for you experience-wise in terms of being able to accomplish what you've accomplished.

AARON HARRISON: Coming back I just I think wanted to enjoy college a little bit more, and I have. I know that I will never play on another team as close as we are. So I think that I just wanted to enjoy it a little bit longer.

WILLIE CAULEY-STEIN: Like what Aaron said, I just wanted to come back, too, and play with these guys one more season. Because last year we was talking right when we lost in the championship game, we got back to the hotel and was like, No, we got to come back and we got to do something bigger.

It's crazy that it's really coming true. It was just words then. Your feelings, your emotions right after the game, right after a loss, but it's really coming true. So we just got to keep on trucking through everything.

Q. Both players, you all closed the first half on a big run after they tied it up. What did that do to you for y'all heading into the second half where they didn't really get any closer than about nine or 10 points?

AARON HARRISON: That's just a part of basketball, really. We knew we had to make a run to break the game open, so that's what we did. We just kept it from there.

WILLIE CAULEY-STEIN: A team like that, you have to make a run early or you have to keep on them early, because they're a streaky team, so they can at any time comeback and hit three, threes and get an and-one, and next thing you know, we're only up by two. So you got to put together stops and make sure you go on a run.

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

Q. You talked before about when you've gone deep in the season with teams that haven't lost, how when they did lose, there was almost like a relief. It seems like whatever that pressure is that leads to that relief, these guys don't really play with that?

COACH CALIPARI: I don't understand it either, so...

Q. What makes that possible?

COACH CALIPARI: You got to ask them, because it's nothing I'm doing. Everybody talking about how we have done this, the platooning and all that. But just have to understand, these players have allowed this to happen. It's not what I've done. It's what they have allowed to happen. Whether it's share time, share minutes, share shots.

I mean, I'm looking right now, we have a guy with eight, a guy with 15, a guy with nine, a guy with 11, a guy with 15. A guy with eight. A guy with five. What we ended up doing all year is when we find a group that has it going, we let them ride.

Now, I want to play all nine of these guys. I want all nine to play. I want Marcus Lee on the floor, but he's got to perform, because he's taking minutes from somebody. If that player's playing well, you don't deserve to have those minutes.

Same with Dakari. Same with Devin. Same with Tyler. I mean, we're a team that's allowed us to play this way, to coach this way, and I've been hard on them now. I mean, we're in the championship game and I'm all over guys. I told

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them, I'm not going to let you step back from where you are. You've worked too hard.

Q. Each game, it seems like there's a new bullet point with this team of some historical fact. Do your guys understand those each time or do you think they have kind of become desensitized a little bit to the kind of historical bullet point each game?

COACH CALIPARI: This team has a lot of dog in it. So I don't think they're worried about numbers. That's ego stuff. I don't think they worry about it.

I was with Bob Rotella and I told him my approach to the last two weeks of the regular season in the tournament was I just want to get it over with so we can get on with the real stuff. If we lose a game, I'm good with it.

He stopped me, Bob Rotella, and said, Your players don't feel that way.

So we got some guys that have some dog in them. You got to understand, if you're playing five or six guys, it really is on those guys. But when you're playing nine, like Willie, the last couple games was ridiculously good. But there were a couple games before that he was ridiculously bad, but we still won. Because I played Marcus, Dakari, Karl played out of his mind.

Karl gets in foul trouble. We're still okay. Play Trey. What? Yeah, we'll play him at a four or five. We're playing him at three, but we can mix and match.

The same with scoring and shooting. There are games where Devin has been unbelievable. There are other games he's been unable. And we went with Aaron, or Andrew more, or Tyler. The same with Andrew.

I'm so proud of Andrew and Aaron right now, of all the guards in the country, you got to look now and say, Wait a minute now, we can all say this that, they're playing as well as anybody in the country those two. It's nice that they have Tyler with them, they have Devin with them, they have Trey with them, they have all these big guys with them, but they're performing.

Q. Going into this tournament you talked about Willie having struggled for the past few weeks, how important was that in these games to have Willie do what he's done?

COACH CALIPARI: It's to get him in that mindset as we go forward. But he made the

statement when we had him cover Harrell, a guard, 6'3", it made him play with unbelievable energy. And he said it turned my offense on.

So, I've been telling all the guys, that's what this is. That's why you go out and clap and slap the floor and talk to one another, because then on offense, you're in that aggressive, attacking mindset.

And we are a defensive team. Now, again, I mean, you know, oh, their offense, well, we shot 51 percent, had 16 assists, shot 58 from the three, probably one of the most efficient teams in the country offensively, Top-5, anyway, top seven.

But we're better offensively when we really guard. It's not like we're getting breakouts. Like Arkansas didn't give us a whole lot of breakouts. We got two or three, four, maybe. But it wasn't like we got 10 break-aways.

Q. It's obvious that the players are having a lot of fun with what's going on this season. When they're playing well, how much fun is it for you and the coaching staff to coach this group of guys?

COACH CALIPARI: Well, here's what I've said going into certain games: If the other team is angry, mad, hateful, jealous, the physiology of that is real close to fear. So when a team comes in that way, if you can just play and that thing turns to fear, you separate yourself.

Joy, the love of playing, always beats angry, hateful, mean, jealous. That love of the game and that joy of playing will always win. And I keep telling them that. Play with joy, man. You got each other, you're covering each other.

I don't go in and say we hate this team or hate this guy. We don't do that here. Our thing is about us being our best version. And the only way you can be your best version is be happy, be joyful.

You want to create joy? Do something for somebody else. Creates joy in your life. Well, when you watch this team play, they're joyful out there because they're playing for each other. They're not playing for themselves.

Q. We'll have the selection committee's decision next two hours. What's your outlook on the SEC after only getting in three teams last two years?

COACH CALIPARI: Well, obviously, I think that Arkansas, Georgia, and us are in. And then Mississippi and LSU I think are based on is

there an upset in another league. But I think both of them deserve to be in.

We had eight Top-50 teams in this league. Eight. That was more than any league in the country. We lost a couple bad games late, but the body of work I keep hearing about. I keep hearing body of work, body of work. Well, their body of work was solid.

So I think that my hope is all five of us get in. Last year, three of us were in the Sweet 16. Two of us were in the Final Four, one of us was in the last game of the year. If you want to go by the numbers, we should have five in.

Q. How mind-boggling is it that two teams consecutive years went 21-0 in this conference, Florida doing it last year?

COACH CALIPARI: Pretty crazy. To do it in this league and have to be on the road and everybody's big game, and my hat's off to Billy. I told him last year, what he did that with team. And it's crazy because it's different. He did it with a veteran group of seniors. We got the fifth youngest team in the country and we will have the youngest team in the country or in the NCAA tournament. We will be the youngest team in that tournament.

So different, but the accomplishment by either of those teams Billy's and this team, is crazy.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

COACH CALIPARI: Thanks, guys.

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