

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday March 11, 2017

John Calipari Malik Monk De'Aaron Fox Kentucky

Kentucky - 79, Alabama - 74

THE MODERATOR: We'll ask Coach Calipari for some opening thoughts on the game, take some questions for the two student-athletes, and then we'll finish up with Coach. Coach, could you begin.

COACH CALIPARI: First of all, I thought Avery had his team ready to go, and those kids fought like heck and we were lucky to get out alive. I thought Derek Willis made a couple 3s down the stretch that kind of stretched it out. Even though early in the game it was hard to keep -- let me tell you, couple things happened today that I think are really special.

One, Malik Monk got up early to come to this gym by himself with Wenyen Gabriel and one of the coaches to get extra shots. He came early. He did it. Second thing that happened is I had he and Isaiah out and I'm going to put them in, but the team on the floor was on a run and they say to me, "Let them stay in." That's where this is starting to go.

The only -- other than family, the only people happier for De'Aaron Fox was Malik Monk, like happy as heck at how he played.

That's the -- the team is starting to come together and understand, you know, numbers don't matter on a team like this. You just -- may be your game, may be another guy's name. That was good for us to see and how they played.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for De'Aaron or Malik.

Q. De'Aaron, I just wanted to ask you about your game. You made -- you got off to a slow start with the turnovers, but you really got into a really good offensive rhythm and kind of started -- I thought really got you kicked off with the shot clock, you



make the shot with one second and get fouled. And then down the stretch, you were just unreal off the dribble. Talk about how you were attacking late.

DE'AARON FOX: I mean, honestly that shot had nothing to do with it. Sometimes we call a play down the stretch and if it works, we keep going to it. I just kept making plays and they kept putting the ball in my hands. When I know the Coach is trusting me and my teammates are trusting me, keep attacking, doing what you're doing. All I got to do is just make the play.

Q. For Malik, what was different about today as opposed to the last couple of games? Was it just something as simple as the extra work this morning or seeing a couple shots go through the net?

MALIK MONK: Like I said -- like you say, I got up early. Early. I knew I had to get up and execute for the team. Me having a shootaround, after every shootaround, I think I have a good game. If I get shots before the game, I just have a good game or have a better flow. So I think I'm going to start doing that, and that's what happened.

Q. De'Aaron, you talked all year about toughness and focusing and decision-making. You were so locked in today, especially down the stretch. What was going through your mind when you were making those decisions?

DE'AARON FOX: Well, I didn't want it to be the same as when I started the game. I had five turnovers in the first half. In the second half, I just wanted to cut down our turnovers and be able to run a team. And especially down the stretch, honestly for me down the stretch, it wasn't too much passing the ball. The whole court was there. Even if Malik is having a bad night, which he didn't today, they're not going to help off of him. He says come to my side if you're trying to score. That's what I did.

Q. De'Aaron, if you could just -- you seemed a little gimpy there at some points during the game. I noticed that you had also changed your shoes. Was it more comfort? Did it have something to do with your ankle giving you any kind of issues?

DE'AARON FOX: No. Honestly, the shoes were the same type of shoe, but the blue ones I was slipping at

the beginning of the game. So after one media timeout, I switched them and I didn't slip anymore and --

COACH CALIPARI: Slipping he so went back to the Nikes. Stop. I'm only teasing.

Q. Guys, I wanted to ask you both what it means to have a guy like Dominique Hawkins that brings that wealth of experience and that defensive intensity, how do you pick up some things from Dom in a game like today?

DE'AARON FOX: I mean, just being able to watch him. In the four years he's been here, I think of all the players he's had to guard. This year it's been me and Malik. Last year it was Tyler and Isaiah, which Isaiah again this year. The year before that, the Harrison twins, Devin Booker. The year before that, he had the twins again and James Young. He's been through this, and he's one of the best defenders in the country.

That's just a testament to how much he's been working and practicing every day going against players like that. You know, you have nothing to do but get better. If you don't, they're going to bury you. He's shown us how to fight and keep up the defensive intensity. When he comes in the game, it's really a spark plug and people see it.

MALIK MONK: He covered everything. When Dom gets in the game, he's going to do what he going to do. I mean, he brings energy and we feed off him, too.

THE MODERATOR: One more.

Q. De'Aaron, you've been own quite the heater since the Texas A&M game. Has there been anything in particular that's really helped you improve your game?

DE'AARON FOX: I'm just getting confident. I went back. One of my friends told Coach Cal something, I won't repeat it. It was something like the whole group. And after that, I mean, I've just been shooting the ball better. Not jinx it. I'm coming to the game with more confidence.

Honestly, when my teammates are getting confidence in me and it's just helping me build my own.

THE MODERATOR: Malik and De'Aaron, you can return to the locker room.

COACH CALIPARI: Let me say one thing as they leave. They had 9 rebounds between them. They had 8 turnovers at halftime. 8. They had none in the second half. That's why we won the game. Two warriors right here and now they got a 3rd game in three days. Is it

noon tomorrow again?

THE MODERATOR: Yes.

COACH CALIPARI: We'll see how we do tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, fellas. We'll take questions now for Coach.

Q. Alabama is bringing back a lot of their rotation next year, what looks to be a really nice recruiting class with a Top Ten player. What's your outlook next year from your perspective?

COACH CALIPARI: Look, to do some of the stuff they did this year -- if you talk to Avery, I bet you there are two or three games that he looks at to say, "We lost these two or three and easily could have won those games." But, you know, you look at their team and you say, oh, my gosh, all of a sudden they're 23-11. It's a different deal.

I will tell you, the guards -- we tried to get the guards they recruited and they beat us on them. And they're really good players and the guys that they have coming back, the size, the skill, I think they're going to be really good.

Q. Coach, talk about -- I thought it was a -- talk about, first of all, the offensive execution both halves. I thought for you guys were really good once the turnovers were cut down. Talk about having to defend Dazon Ingram. I thought he was great all three days.

COACH CALIPARI: The thing that he does, he's not afraid to get it to the rim. He plays to his strengths. He's physical. He's not afraid. Has a little bit of a swag about him. Kind of guy I like to coach. And he did it today. He took that ball to 8, 8 feet and said I'm scoring this one. Got it by us and he's a good player.

Q. John, you've used the 4-guard lineup before with Mychal. I think down the stretch you had Dom out there with it. What was the decision?

COACH CALIPARI: I had Isaiah because I didn't want -- you know, we looked and I said if Morris gets going, that's how they're going to get back in this. They put him at 4. I just said that's it. Isaiah, you're going to go guard him. I kind of switched it off. We went to offense. I put Derek back in. Derek made a shot. Ball stop. Isaiah got back in.

The reason I did it is Isaiah defensively and rebounding is an absolute animal and has that unbelievable will to win. Derek Willis spreads the court out on offense and we were going to go at De'Aaron Fox and pick-and-roll. So I just put a guy in there that would make them play out, and then De'Aaron made some tough layups.

Q. Coach, early in the game they seemed to really hurt you on the backboard, the offensive board. You seemed to rotate some guys in there. What ended up working for you?

COACH CALIPARI: Took some guys out, if you want to say it nicely. I told some guys, "You are out." They were just more physical than us. They outrebounded us today. But down the stretch we got -- Bam missed the one. He -- Isaiah said he didn't have the finger on it. I thought Isaiah tipped it from him. He said no, he just didn't bring it in.

Short of that -- I thought De'Aaron Fox rebounded like crazy today. But, you know, that 4 spot. Then I look, Wenyen got 4 rebounds in 17 minutes and that's what I'm asking him to do. He didn't make the free throw, but it was a good play to kind of stop the action because the start of the game kind of looked ugly.

THE MODERATOR: Two more.

Q. John, got to make you feel good to see your seniors doing what they're doing, guys like Willis and Hawkins coming in, being a bulldog like he is on defense doing the rough, tough stuff. Talk about those guys a little bit.

COACH CALIPARI: I'm happy with all three. I've said it before, this is the best they played in their careers.

Now, Derek did not play well in the first half. That's why I started Wenyen in the second half. Mychal made that 3, and it was a big one because it made the game close again where it was kind of getting away from it.

Dom does what he does. I played him 29 minutes. He goes 2-3 from the field, 1-1 -- 2-2 from the line. Just guards, you know, an assist, a steal, no turnovers. His turnover to -- assists to turnover ratio may be the best in the country. So, it's nice to have him. It's nice to have Derek. It's nice to have Mychal. Talk about two guys that spread the court out, Mychal and Derek do that.

THE MODERATOR: Last question.

Q. Coach, this team has won ten games in a row and in a variety of ways. What is it that it's doing really well right now, that's making it click as you prepare for tomorrow and beyond with the NCAA Tournament?

COACH CALIPARI: We have a great will to win. What you don't want as a coach is for players to think you can not be prepared to play a game and then you can turn it on and you'll be okay.

Any coach out there listening to this will say, exactly.

Because you're going to play somebody that comes in and smacks you and you get down and they're too good to come back on, and then you know what, your season ends. Oh, yeah, yeah. That was your last game. All because of a start, because you weren't ready to get in there and fight.

And so when you have all 18 and 19-year-olds like we do, they sometimes think that. Doesn't matter what happens.

Now, the other side of that we were down 19, 16, 15, 17, whatever, and came back and won. The mentality I like, which is we're always -- we always have a chance. But we also have been up 18, 19, 20 and almost let teams come back on us. We've had to work on that. You've had to work on being up 18? Yes. Because we look up and it's 3.

And so we are a team that's trying to figure some stuff out. We're pressing some, we're doing some different kind of trapping. We're still not like there yet, but we're moving where I want us to go. We've rebooted about two weeks -- more than that, probably three weeks ago and we've been tweaking and trying and, you know, the best thing I can tell you, I have really good players. They're just really young. Oh, so young. They're like the youngest team in the country.

And so I got to accept that sometimes, you know, accept Malik doing some of the stuff or De'Aaron or Bam, you know, why did you do that? Why would you foul a 3-point shooter with the shot clock and he ain't making it? Why did you do that? Because he's a freshman. He was going to keep him from scoring.

I mean, it's what we deal with every year here. But I'll say this, I got really good players who are really good kids who are willing to share, could have gone somewhere else and took 30 shots a game, had two guys shoot all the balls, the rest of you set screens. They could have gone to places like that. These kids share. And if someone gets it going, they let him go. That is a great sign for us going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.