

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday March 12, 2017

John Calipari
Malik Monk
Dominique Hawkins
De'Aaron Fox
Edrice Adebayo
Kentucky

Kentucky - 82, Arkansas - 65

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with Kentucky. We'll ask Coach Calipari for some general thoughts on the game. Then we'll take your questions for the student-athletes and then excuse them back to the locker room, then finish up with Coach. Coach, would you begin.

COACH CALIPARI: It was a good win. Happy for them. Happy for all these guys. We're starting to build a bench that we know we can go to. I felt Wenyen Gabriel is back on that path he was on earlier in the year, which I'm really happy for them. You know Wen had one rebound at halftime and ends up with nine. Does that mean he should be getting 15, 16 a game? Probably, you know, but guard play has been good, and this is a good tournament. It's -- we came in and made some good plays at the end of the half to get up and kind of held on.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take your questions for any of the student-athletes.

Q. Any of you guys up there about Dom, just what he delivered for you guys this tournament and this game in particular?

THE MODERATOR: Direct it to one player.

Q. Your thoughts on what Dom did for you guys this weekend and this game in particular?

DE'AARON FOX: Oh, man, we said it all year, Dom has been an sparkplug off the bench. Today he had 4 steals and yesterday we talked about the guys he's had to guard over the years. That's just made him better. Just coming in to practice everyday, he's better. This



tournament he proved that he deserves to be on the national stage like that.

Q. Dominique, can you talk a little bit about what this whole tournament has meant to you and to play the role did you today in winning the championship?

DOMINIQUE HAWKINS: Yeah. This tournament means a lot to me. Been here for all four years to the finals of each four years as well, but I never had a game like I did today. I felt I took advantage of my playing time today.

Q. For Malik, there was reports of a pregame taunting by one of the Arkansas staff members toward you, and there appeared to be incidents where he made a throat slash gesture after making shots. Can you walk us through what happened and what you were feeling there?

MALIK MONK: I really don't remember what happened. I don't remember what he said. He's saying stuff before the game, we were warming up, and they were talking and talking. It's Arkansas. I don't know. I made a 3, emotions took over, made a little like the game was over. I mean, I just got to learn from that.

Q. Malik, could you talk about there at the end of the game, things seemed to get pretty chippy of both ends of the floor. What was going on and controlling emotions at that time?

MALIK MONK: Say that again.

Q. Talk about at the end of the game when things got a little bit chippy with the foul against De'Aaron, and the foul off Dom and kind of controlling emotions.

MALIK MONK: We knew it would be a physical team. Coach Calipari told us that before the game. We just had to keep our composure and stay together as a team, and that's what we did.

Q. For Bam and De'Aaron, as players what's the locker room like entering the NCAA Tournament? You've won 11 straight games, SEC Championships. What's the confidence heading into this week?

EDRICE ADEBAYO: We're on a positive roll. We're all confident and believe in each other. We're sticking

together as brothers, and that's about it.

DE'AARON FOX: Yeah, just like he said, the confidence level and the last few games of the regular season, we started off slow, and in the tournament we didn't have that problem. So, just coming out and playing hard. Feel like it's going to be hard to beat us when we play hard for 40 minutes.

THE MODERATOR: One or two more for the student-athletes. Anyone? Thank you. You can return to the locker room. We'll continue on with questions for Coach Calipari.

Q. Cal, what did you see from Dom this tournament and this game in particular? It was like he was fired out of a cannon, sort of the way he was flying around today.

COACH CALIPARI: Well, all three games. And really late in the season, it's almost like you're waiting to put him in the game, like something has to happen so you can hurry up and put him in. His energy level, his aggressiveness. You know, I said it yesterday, I don't care how old you are. I just want to make sure you're playing with high energy. I want to make sure that you're not afraid to miss shots, that you're not afraid to lose and you're just playing. You're unselfish. You're playing with your team. Think about it. That's all what he is.

I'm just so happy. I mean -- you know, here's a young man that waited his turn and, you know it's hard to do these days, you know. He's looking around and everybody is flying out and looking at the All Star Games, you know. But, you know, he, Mychal and De'Aaron, all three are getting their degrees. And he's got -- he's going to have a great life. He's going to have a great life.

I'm telling you, he is one of the neatest -- he's a true leader, he's about everybody else. Such a kind heart. You can't believe that when you watch him play. You think there's no way this is -- he wouldn't -- he's shooting flies like (indicating) go. He wouldn't kill a fly. But he's, you know, just great. He's a Kentucky kid. I know all the Kentucky fans, you know, like me to have 12 Kentucky kids and win a national title. It's a little hard to do. If I could, I would, believe me, but --

Q. You talked the last couple of days about this team becoming more unselfish and buying into what you and your staff are talking. When they do that and they're clicking, how much fun is it to watch them do what they do?

COACH CALIPARI: Here's -- it's a ball because they're really talented. This is a talented group. I know they say there are other teams more talented. I'll take mine.

Let me start right there. I will take mine.

There are more veteran teams and physical teams, but this team -- and they're all good kids. Bam -- how many of you were so mad that they weren't throwing Bam the ball yesterday? Raise your hand. That's what I thought. Everybody. You're mad. Why aren't you throwing the ball. Well, he didn't say anything. He didn't say anything to me or to his teammate. We're at halftime saying it, and he just looks, okay.

So, that's Bam. You look at whether it's De'Aaron Fox or Isaiah Briscoe. Isaiah Briscoe is doing what this team needs to do to win, which means he sacrifices some things. You know, he's playing the way we need him to play to win. But it's the whole team doing that. So, yeah, they're fun to watch.

The whole key to us will be defense. If we continue to guard, we'll have a nice little run. We'll see what happens. But that's where we're -- our defense is what we are. And I don't worry about offense with this group because we're so -- we're fast, we can shoot it, we can post it, play pick-and-roll, play against zone.

Derek Willis stretches the defense. Wenyen is playing better now. But if we don't defend, we'll lose real fast, like real fast. We guard and play with great energy and disrupt and do the things we've been doing, it should be a fun NCAA Tournament.

Q. John, how big a deal is it you finished the half out with your seniors, Isaac and Isaiah, in the game and they stretch the lead out? How important is that for those guys to be able to hang in there and do that kind of thing now?

COACH CALIPARI: I said after the game, we're building our bench. Mychal, Derek and Dom have never played better. None of them have ever played better in their lives. Isaac gave us something tonight for the first time. He does that. And Wenyen, it's been two, three weeks where Wenyen has not given it to us. So he played today. When you have a deep bench going into this tournament, you have more room for error, injuries, foul trouble, bad play, a guy gets sick. When you have five, six guys and that one guy goes down and you're deep into your bunch, you're losing.

We've got a deep bench, which means if you have a bad game, let's try to win and move on. You play better next game. That's what's nice about being deep, having a deep team.

Q. Cal, can you just talk about how well those four guys played together, not just scoring but how well-rounded they've become together?

COACH CALIPARI: The only way that happens is if all

these guys are, one, comfortable in their own skin. They're comfortable with what kind of player they are becoming. They like the path they're on. They are not being judged by numbers, points, shots, minutes. They don't get judged that way at Kentucky. You don't have to score 30 a game. Ask Anthony Davis -- should I go through that litany of 25 names? You don't have to.

Then the second thing is you are naturally a gatherer of other people. Like if I walk in the gym and I see a kid by himself, warming up by himself, everything by himself, I don't want that kid on my team. I just don't. I need a guy that's a gatherer, that they enjoy being together.

This is six months. Every game we play is a Super Bowl, T-shirt night. I'm going to get into the T-shirt business. Every game we go to is white out, blue out, black out, it doesn't matter. These kids have to come every day and they're going to class and they got to handle themselves in the community the right way.

If something happens with my kids, it's on the ticker and they're doing a 30/30 on it. So it's a hard deal and they come together, they got to be about each other. They got to cover for each other. They got to be each -- they got to be their brother's keeper.

These kids like Bam, is the nicest kid maybe I've ever coached. I mean, he's -- somebody said Cal, you're playing him and he could be playing 4. So could Anthony Davis and Karl Townes. So could DeMarcus Cousins. They all could have been playing 4, too. They're doing fine. The kid can shoot. He can handle it, guard five positions. He's fine.

But he's not complaining why don't you play me? What do you need me to do to win?

Q. Coach, you talked various times about wanting to see how your team responded to being punched in the mouth.

COACH CALIPARI: I didn't mean literally.

Q. Was this the kind of game you had in mind, and more seriously did you feel like you showed the right kind of poise under duress today and what does that mean for the tournament?

COACH CALIPARI: First of all, Arkansas is going to come after you and they're going to attack and play physical. It's what they do.

You're going to get a lot of touches, bumps, grabs. That's just how they play. I'm not saying it's bad or good. I'm just saying that's how they play.

We needed that kind of game. You're also talking

about a team they're a motion offense. Hard cuts, you could not stop because they fly it up and start moving that ball and moving bodies. We needed that. The only thing I got bothered by at the end we had two plays, one De'Aaron threw it away. Instead of trying to get it open, he seen the guy and throw it over my head. No, you get open. But that ends up being a great teaching point, and, you know, we did what we had to.

Late in the games we're a really good foul shooting team. If someone goes back and looks, especially in games you're trying to finish off the game, I bet you we're shooting, 90, 95 percent at that point. We missed some during the game. I can't remember if it's Georgia, Alabama in the first half. When the game is winding down and winning time, those kids make free throws, too.

THE MODERATOR: One, two more questions.

Q. Cal, so today watching Sunday a lot of expectations. Last year you weren't happy with your seeding being a 4 seed. What do you think will be the proper seed for your team this year after winning the regular season and tournament title?

COACH CALIPARI: I don't think winning the SEC Tournament will have any say in what our seed is. It never has. We could have won by 40. Whatever seed we had before this game, that's what our seed will be. The game that was the big game was Georgia because in other leagues, you can lose that first game and you're fine. In this league you lose the first game, you become a 9 seed. We had to win that first game.

I say that this is the youngest conference out of all 32 in the country, this league. We had 11 teams in the Top 100. We had seven in the Top 50. No, you didn't. Yes, we did. This is the best this league has been since 2005. We're getting -- we should get five teams in. I would hope maybe six maybe sneak in, but I think it's going to be five. Let's see how we advance to see what this league really is. And let me say this again, the youngest league out of 32 leagues in the country is this league.

Now, my young guys are going to take off, I would guess. But there are a lot of young guys going to be in this league next year and the following year, and all of a sudden you're going to look at what we're talking about eight, nine, ten teams in the NCAA Tournament, which is what we're trying to build to here.

THE MODERATOR: Last question.

Q. Coach, did you see Malik Monk's throat slash and how did you react to it?

COACH CALIPARI: I didn't see it. There was stuff -- I

was half paying attention. There was some back and forth with the coach prior to the game. Look, you know, I didn't -- I took him out because I -- I took he and De'Aaron out because it got rough. I didn't know -- what you said I just heard for the first time. But obviously, when it really got rough, not one of my kids moved. They huddled together. None of them came back at anybody. Class. When it got rough, there was no back-and-forth by my team. That's poise. And when you're talking 18 and 19-year-old kids having that kind of poise, your first response is to go after somebody. They didn't.

So, I'm going to talk to him. I'll ask him. I didn't even see what you're talking about. Was it in the game?

Q. Twice.

COACH CALIPARI: If I would have seen it, I would have said something. He's a good kid. This is all new to them. Nineteen-year-olds. He's playing against Arkansas where he came from and all over him? But, that -- no need for that and there's no place for that in what we're doing and how we're teaching at Kentucky.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.