

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday March 9, 2018

John Calipari
Shai Gilgeous-
Alexander
P.J. Washington
Kevin Knox
Kentucky

Kentucky - 62, Georgia - 49

JOHN CALIPARI: It was a good win. First game out is always hard, especially when the other team has played. I like the fact that we rebounded the ball. Kevin Knox had nine rebounds. I said after that everybody in the building was surprised, but he did. And we had five turnovers.

We're out here with guys figuring it out. At the end of the game was probably the only time I got upset because we're trying to use clock and we're shooting it quick. I'm not looking at this game when you're up 12. I'm looking at a game when you're up 5, and you want to shorten the game a little bit on somebody and make a dagger play.

We don't know that stuff yet. We're trying to work our way through it. We need a game, and we probably need a couple games based on the fact of seeing how these guys are playing together.

Q. This question is for Shai. P.J. and Kevin, if you don't like Shai's answer, you can chime in also. Shai, at the very beginning mentally, you seemed to be so locked in. How was preparation for this, your first postseason game, different from that of the regular season?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I think it was due to the fact that I didn't like the way I came out and we came out in our last game against Florida. I felt like we weren't competing and mentally locked in, and I just wanted to do that today.

Q. Kevin, I'm sure you've heard in your time at Kentucky how your fans will travel anywhere and



especially to the SEC tournaments and even being in St. Louis a little bit farther away than usual. Did this kind of live up to your expectations, and how much did the fans being on your side support the victory today?

KEVIN KNOX: It was great to see how many fans came out. I think there was more blue than any other team in the whole tournament. That just shows how committed our fans are. We've got the best fans in the world. They travel pretty much anywhere else in the world to watch us play. It's good to know you've got your fans in there when you play any game, and they're there to support you.

Q. This is for any of you, probably especially P.J. How are you all able to lock down Yante Maten, like you were able to, obviously, SEC Player of the Year?

P.J. WASHINGTON: We just tried to come out and focus on our game plan. We were trying to trap them down low, and I felt like we did a great job of that in both halves. We limited him to some minor baskets, I think free throws and stuff like that. We just fouled him on some open threes too. So he got lucky on those.

We slipped up a little bit on the defensive end, but we played great.

Q. P.J., yesterday Coach Cal alluded to the fact that you played really, really well with Jarred. You were kind of locked into a buddy system. Were you in any way offended by that? How satisfying is it for you to come out and have a great game with all these other guys?

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, were you offended by that? I hope so.

P.J. WASHINGTON: No, I wasn't offended at all. It's great playing with a guy like Jarred. He complements my game, and I complement his. It was hard to see him go down. We just all tried to step up and get this "W."

Q. Shai, you had nine assists. I know the team had 14 on 26 field goals. What were you seeing to be able to share the ball today?

SHAI GILGEOUS-ALEXANDER: I think it was my teammates did a really good job of spacing the floor when I was coming off of pick-and-rolls, and Coach has

been drilling that lately, giving it up early off of pick-and-rolls and stuff like that. I just tried to do that today, get guys involved early, and it played well today.

Q. John, your team held Georgia to the lowest amount of points you've held anybody this season. What was going right on defense that sort of prevented Georgia from scoring really at all?

JOHN CALIPARI: It was their third game in three days. Our whole thing was let's get into their legs. Let's pressure them. Let's do things to get into their legs. That was probably the biggest reason.

I think the job Mark Fox did -- you know, at the end of the year, they have Texas A&M, and they lose it with 50 seconds to go. They have Tennessee on the road beat, played Tennessee in that building better than anybody played them in the last two months, and they got beat with 50 seconds to go. It was kind of crazy how they got beat.

And then I made a statement that they could make a run. And I told Mark before, you know what, if you beat us, I'd be happy for you and then go win this whole thing because the job -- and those two young kids, the Hightower kid and the Claxton kid, are going to be two of our best players in this league as we keep going forward.

So I think a part of it was that was their third game in three days, and that's hard. You know, it's hard to do.

Q. Coach, how much do you think Jarred being out hurts you guys in defensive rebounds, particularly in the first half, and what's the status moving forward?

JOHN CALIPARI: It affects us because he is an active player, but it's as much offensive rebounding as defense, and we did get 14 offensive rebounds today. But it gives Wenyen a chance. It gives Nick a chance and Sacha.

I thought Sacha played well today, and I'll watch the tape again, but I thought he played well.

Nick's got to come up with rebounds. That's why you're in the game. You can either do it -- if you don't do it, I can't keep you in the game. You must get rebounds. Block shots, defend. All the other stuff is secondary. That's what this team needs from that guy.

I thought Wenyen bumbled some balls and bobbled some balls in the first half, and we kind of grabbed them a little bit like come on, man, grab the ball with two hands. What are you fumbling around for?

But this is -- look, for these guys this is all brand new.

For them to perform like they did in this tournament this first game, come on. I mean, we're out there with all freshmen.

And I thought, again, we were trying to figure out without Jarred. Jarred, what I saw today, will not play tomorrow. He's still limping. I told him, as soon as you can jump up and grab the rim with two hands, come on over and talk to me. But here's a kid that, Coach, I can play through this pain. I can do this.

Look, at this time of year for everyone here, you can't play with anybody that's at 80 percent. You can't. You can't because the games are at too high level and you just play too hard.

So we're just seeing. We've got time, but learning to play without him was a big part of today. And, again, let me say this: When we lost four in a row, he was playing. Like when we lost four, he was playing. And then we started playing better, and we started winning because everybody was saying, well, Jarred came back and screwed the team up, if you remember. Some of you here probably wrote that. And then we started playing better, and now it was, okay, Jarred. Now we're not playing with him, and we'll have to see.

Q. John, I know you were perplexed in Gainesville about passing the ball. Today you guys had 14 assists. How much of that was kind of a point of emphasis, and how encouraging was that today?

JOHN CALIPARI: We've still got work to do. You can't -- in this game, it can't be about an assist. It's got to be the ball goes to the man that's open. And we're still -- we pass the first guy to try to see if I can get it to the second guy. Can't play that way. But, again, 14 assists, 5 turns in a game that was played fairly slow, which is what happens in tournament play, is pretty good for a young team.

Q. Coach, sorry to be that guy, but your thoughts about Alabama who you played a couple of weeks ago, and in particular, Collin Sexton.

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, I didn't watch the game, and I didn't really see, but somebody just said he made five in a row from the three, went crazy, went off. So I imagine that he really played well. And I know how good he is.

Look, they've got size. They've got scoring ability. They've got length. They've got toughness. They went through what we went through. They lost four, five in a row. They did exactly what we went through. And you won't believe this, you don't like going through that. Normally, if you can survive it, it makes your team better. It makes them stronger. How about this: It makes them appreciate winning more. It makes it so

I'm not going to be selfish so we lose. I'll give up something so that we win.

And that's what happened to this team. This team became a very happy team. They went from being shell-shocked and rocked, a little fearful, to a happy, aggressive team when we started winning. Part of it, we just had to win a game.

And then Alabama's case, they had to, and Sexton made that runner late and wins the game, and now all of a sudden the season changes. They're an NCAA Tournament team. They're that good. So does A&M. Who knows what's going to happen with Mississippi State? What if they go crazy here?

Now all of a sudden, how about nine teams in? Remember I used to talk about us getting nine teams in, and you all say he needs to be drug tested, this guy. That's where we are right now, eight teams in and maybe nine. It's crazy. I love it. You don't have to win every game. Like you can lose to somebody and be okay. We had the fourth toughest schedule in the country, and our nonconference was like third.

Normally, you've got a real strong nonconference, you get in league, and it all of a sudden goes to 20. Not now. We beat each other up, and our strength of schedule within this league has gone up, which is great for all of our teams.

Q. John, I know you're a fan of Mark Fox. I also know that people speculated about his job security. Can you make the case to me why you think he should continue as the Georgia coach.

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, let me say this. Everybody that's watched us play against each other, Georgia and Kentucky, they've all been wars. I know how good a coach he is. I know what he's doing with young kids. He's doing it the right way. He's a great guy.

You know, in a way -- and I told him prior to the game. I said, I'd love for you to beat us and get two more and go play in that tournament and squelch all the crap. It's nuts in our profession. Guys like a Mark Fox, they could consider and say, well, he's not doing a good enough job for us. I just beg to differ.

And aside from being a great coach, I'm telling you -- look, you can sit there and evaluate, but I coach against him. So I know what he brings every time to the table. And then being such a good person and all that stuff, I mean, you're just like -- like I had to sit up there with Andy Kennedy, right? You know he's the winningest coach in the history of Mississippi. You know how long that will stand in. We'll all be dead. Everybody in the room will be dead before someone gets as many wins as he gets there. And, again, it's

another great guy. So let's just hope that Georgia looks at this and looks at a bigger picture and says, you know what, it's in good hands.

There's a lot of stuff going on out there, stuff that's not going on at Georgia. They're in good hands. That has to mean something.

Q. John, I know you love playing on consecutive days, but what realistically can you do to prepare for Alabama tomorrow? Can you walk us through what your schedule's going to be like?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, what I'll do is I'll go back and watch our game tape first. Then I'll watch our game tape with Alabama. Then I'll watch the two games they played here. Then I have to, to build my confidence, go watch a game that they got beat. I can't watch them winning every game. So I'll have to go watch one where they lost, where I'll say, okay, we've got a chance.

We'll meet with the team, and we'll talk through how we're going to play them. Because we've played everybody, you have an idea of what -- you can go back to your notes. But I've got a lot of work to do, and we'll probably get the team together at probably 7:00, something like that. By that time, I'll have enough tape worked on.

The other guys have done tape ahead of time. I don't. I don't do anything until the game's over. I don't want to get ahead of myself. I want to worry more about my own team. So I watch our game tape, and we'll go from there. We'll get up tomorrow. What time is the game?

Q. Noon.

JOHN CALIPARI: It's at noon? (Laughter)

What's that mean? It gives us an extra hour? What are you talking about?

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.