

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday March 10, 2018

John Calipari Wenyen Gabriel Sacha Killeya-Jones Kentucky

Kentucky - 86, Alabama - 63

JOHN CALIPARI: That was a good ball game. We're a team that, if we make threes like that, that's what we can do to people. We're not a team that that's what we live and die with. But Wenyen was unbelievable today. But I also -- I got to tell you, Sacha, who hadn't had the opportunity, has been playing behind some pretty good players, now his chance is there. And I'll tell you, I'm watching him play, both on defense, offense, rebounding the ball. He's fighting. He makes us different.

And Hami is coming around. He made some plays today, some threes. They're starting to come together. 20 assists, 10 turnovers, big for us. We're a young, inexperienced team to play in a game like that, especially when they were pressing in the end and still end up with 10 turnovers, pretty big deal.

Q. Wenyen, obviously, you were on fire today. What did you do differently in terms of preparation, and when did you know that you were in the zone.

WENYEN GABRIEL: I think I was in the zone after probably my third three. Preparation today, Vanderbilt's been off a little bit. The coach has been telling me everybody needs to give more here and there. I came in with more of a level of focus. I just let it fly. Teammates trusted in me, and shots fell today.

Q. Wenyen, there was a moment after your -- I think it was your seventh three when you guys went back in your time-out and your teammates were pushing you around. You were throwing your hands up, like trying to pump up the crowd. I think they were chanting like Go Big Blue. Could you just take us through that moment. Like how big Big Blue Nation has been for you guys this tournament?

WENYEN GABRIEL: That moment was great. It just shows how much appreciation they've got for us, all the



support. You could feel the energy in the crowd, almost like it was a home game out there. I was trying to get them riled up to help us push through that game.

Q. Sacha, it seems like in the second half, right from the start, you came in with a lot of production. Was there anything at halftime or anything that was said that you recognized that caused the change for you.

SACHA KILLEYA-JONES: Not really. Just trying to do what I could do to help my team and help us win the game. My teammates did a great job of finding me and creating shots for me. That comes along with it when you just try to play within the team.

Q. Wenyen, have you ever had a game like that where you just couldn't miss and kept taking shots and still making them?

WENYEN GABRIEL: I've had a game like that before. Obviously, not in a Kentucky uniform yet. That was great to have one of these today for my confidence going forward. We've got some big games coming up ahead, trying to bring home some hardware tomorrow and move on to the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Hami, we notice that you're smiling a lot more on the court. It seems like you're having a lot more fun. Is there a moment this year when the switch kind of flipped and the game got a lot more enjoyable for you?

HAMIDOU DIALLO: Just going through adversity is tough, obviously. At first when adversity hit me, it was tough for me. I was having tough times. Having a team like this and coaches that just trusted in me and just told me to keep pushing and keep trying to work, and one day it's just going to turn around. Ever since then, I've just been smiling and happy to be around these guys and just happy to be playing the game I love.

Q. John, when one of your players is making shots like the way Wenyen was, do you change the game plan any or just stick with what was working?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, what's happened is with Wenyen playing as one of five guys, we now have four or five three-point shooters. So he can just space the court, and the guy guarding him is usually a bigger guy, and he's not going to go out there, and that's what happened today. He was basically at the five. He's not

a five, obviously. But that's what we put him at because of his length. When we go with that lineup with him and P.J. and Kevin Knox, I mean, we are 6'9", 6'9" or 6'10" and 6'8", but that's not our big lineup. So he gets to play against the five.

We try to put him in some pick-and-rolls and get him a couple more, but they kind of switched those. So that wasn't available.

Q. John, you guys shot 64 percent and over 20 assists. How sustainable is offensive performance like this at that level for the championship game and then moving forward in the NCAA Tournament?

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, it's probably not sustainable, but let me say this: The people that have watched this, do we rely on three-point shots to win? We don't. If we make -- wow, we made 12. Then we're probably going to win by 20. If we make 6 or 7, we're okay. But many games we made two or three and still won because we don't play like the three ball is. If it's there, we'll take it. It spaces the court.

You know, you have teams that must take 10 or 11 or 12 or they're going to lose. We're kind of the other way, and I kind of like it being that way. And to be honest, most of my teams here at Kentucky have been that way.

Q. Coach, for a team that's so young, I mean, talk about you guys' ability to have 20 assists on 27 field goals and the attitude that says about your team.

JOHN CALIPARI: They're growing up. The best thing that happened to my team, not me personally, was the four losses in a row. Me, I was ready to jump off a bridge. But I knew and I told them, I've been through this before. They needed that. They needed to be told you're not good enough, and you're not going to do this by yourself. You've got to unpack your bags, and let's get this together as a team and figure this stuff out.

And the second thing was they have to learn to conquer themselves. Things have to go wrong, and you've got to take stock and say it's me. See, around them, everybody will say it's the coach, it's another player. He doesn't take him out when he does that. He just takes -- and they're hearing that, and they're trying to deal with that. They've got to conquer themselves, which is take responsibility for how you're playing. Take responsibility for who you are right now.

The other thing is the self discipline of being on time, going to every class on time. Mainly because you're disciplined off the court, you'll be that way on the court. I've never in 35 years seen a guy undisciplined off the

court be disciplined on the court. It doesn't happen. It just doesn't. So they've got to conquer themselves, and it's taken time. And I knew it would take time. I said it at the beginning of the year, this is going to be ugly before it gets good.

What you're seeing right now is these kids have committed to each other. They're working really hard. But I don't know what tomorrow brings. It could be six assists like we got at Florida. How about that? And 15 turnovers. Why didn't you pass to each other? I don't know. I mean, what happened? We were just playing -- they're inexperienced, and they want to revert. They want to go back to what they want to do, which is easier for them.

The stuff we're doing is really hard. You've got to sacrifice. You're going to be less, but be more by being less. You're going to take less and be more. You're going to share more, you're going to be about your teammates, and when it all ends, everybody's going to say, wow, you can really play. That's what is just hard when you've got all these young kids, and then everybody, when they're this talented -- and this team is more talented than everybody's giving them credit for.

And because we're so separated, it became, this is my least talented team. That's not true. This team has talent. It doesn't matter if you're not like that. It doesn't. If anybody's playing for themselves, when a team comes together, that's obvious. That guy can't be in or this guy can't be in. He's playing for himself when a team gets to where we are.

Tomorrow will be hard. Three games in three days, tough. We lose an hour?

Q. We did.

JOHN CALIPARI: What time's the game?

THE MODERATOR: 12:00 noon.

Q. John, you not only coached the team on the court, but it seems like you've spent an inordinate amount of time playing psychologist, psychotherapist. Has this been your most challenging team in terms of dealing with that aspect? And how, obviously, important do you think that is to the success of the team?

JOHN CALIPARI: Here's the thing I can never lose sight of: I'm trying to prepare these kids for the rest of their lives. Some of them will be with me one year. Now, they go to class. They're getting 30 credits when they leave if they stay one year. Most of them are B students. We've graduated 17 players. We have three players in the NBA with college degrees. We have four

guys that are coming back that left early. But my job is, again, to teach them to conquer themselves, to teach them to be great teammates.

Pat Riley said to me, you know what, your kids come into this league, and they're great teammates. Yeah, they all had to share. They couldn't be the man by themselves. They had to be one of five, six, seven -- Anthony Davis, Michael Kidd. How about Karl Townes? Played 21 minutes a game. Devin Booker to this day is still mad that I didn't start him. He said, yeah, it would have been senior night. I wonder if he would have started me. I texted him, and he didn't hit me back. He's mad.

But my job is to prepare them to go have success, and I'm just trying to go win the next basketball game, I'm cheating these kids. And if we had to lose some games and I've got to deal with it to get that right, then we'll lose some games, and I'll deal with it.

This team, the youngest, most inexperienced team I've ever attempted to coach and at times the maturity level is -- there's something to be desired there at times. Basically, I'm saying they're young, 18s and 19s. They're very young, and they haven't been -- they've never been coached this way. They've never been told no.

You know what? I get tired. I don't get frustrated. I was in bed last night at 8:45, had a great night, woke up. My wife thinks I'm -- what's wrong with you? She says, I'm not getting old. You're getting old.

I said, Well, do what I'm doing. You're over here petting the dogs. I have to go with this thing here. You'd be tired too.