

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

## Kentucky Wildcats

### John Calipari

Men's Media Day Press Conference

**Q. I want to ask you about Mike White. Having coached against him over the years, what do you feel like he is going to bring to the Georgia basketball program?**

JOHN CALIPARI: First of all, he's a terrific coach. His teams will compete. They're smart. All the stuff that you want in a coach, and he is a terrific person. He'll be involved in that community. He recruits with the best of them.

He's good. He's good.

In the league, you have guys that you just enjoy being around, and he's one of them for me.

**Q. With transfers and freshmen coming in, where do you think the biggest development has been made on your team in the off-season?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, we have more veterans than I've had in a long time, and those veterans are speeding up practice. Like we're doing more than we normally would do in the first couple weeks because we've been there -- plus the Bahamas, that trip helped us.

But our young kids are good. Antonio is playing good. Cason and Chris and even Adou, the young players are playing good.

But we have a veteran team. Jacob was supposed to be here. He got hurt yesterday in practice. Nothing crazy, but I just said, stay back. Oscar had a procedure that -- he's walking around, is not swelled already. But he's not human; he's a little different than the rest of us.

Then Lance had a muscle pull. He had been out.

Yesterday we had seven practice, so we had managers,



walk-ons and a coach on the floor with us. Hard to get better that way, but sometimes that stuff happens.

**Q. What is your sense for -- do you expect to hold Oscar out for the exhibitions? Do you think he'll be ready for the actual opener?**

JOHN CALIPARI: To be honest, I can't tell you, because when I saw him yesterday, I just busted out laughing. Like you're supposed to be swelled, you're supposed to be on crutches for a week. He's walking around showing, look, I'm fine, and I've got no swelling.

I just don't know.

Now, you know me well enough, I'll keep him out longer than he probably should. But he's pretty resilient. We'll see. He won't do anything this weekend when we're in Pikeville.

**Q. The Indiana series has come back up this summer. What's the status on that, and are you open to home courts again?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, we've agreed in principle that we'll be playing them. It'll start in 25-26. But it's at the administrative level now, so all the details will be worked out.

But it's good for our season ticket holders to know like next year is Gonzaga and Michigan; the following year you've got Louisville and one of the challenges; then you've got the next year the game -- so I kind of like that we're going out so they'll all know, here are the games we're playing.

Now, the issue with it is scheduling is fun and easy. Then you've got to play the games. So when you start talking Gonzaga, when you start talking the teams in the CBS Classic, the teams in the challenge that we play -- this year I think we're playing Michigan State, but it's also Kansas and it's also Duke. The challenge within the Big 12. I'm kind of surprised that we're playing Kansas again. Like so all of a sudden you've got all these games, Louisville every year. Kenny is going to do a great job.

But this will put us out five or six years. You'll know what it is.



The crazy thing is our league has gotten so much better. I mean, Tennessee, this will be one of Rick's -- in my opinion, and I haven't seen them play, but I know him and I know the personnel, one of his better teams.

You know what's happening at Arkansas, the job they're doing. The job at Auburn, Alabama, playing the way they play, which is a little different.

We've got a bunch of teams. We've got new guys that have good teams that are coming in.

Did I miss somebody? Who? Is there another team I missed?

But you've got top-15 teams in this league now. So where you get in your league, you're going to play seven, six ranked teams. Now you go add three or four more, all of a sudden you'd better stay away from injury.

**Q. Why did you select these two players to bring here to Birmingham today, and do you welcome Oklahoma and Texas in the future?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, the two guys were because we had a lot of guys beat up, and Sahvir was coming, and then it was Oscar and then it was Jacob and then it was Lance. And to be honest with you, I know you know these kids absolutely all want to come here, so when you say, We need someone else, they're all ducking, like I'm out, I've got class, I've got studying. I said, Look, we've got to take two with us; you're coming and you're coming. That's where I imagine the other coaches are probably -- look, the two guys that drew the short straws are in the back.

The Texas-Oklahoma is going to be good.

I'm going to shift a little bit with name, image, and likeness. I have one concern -- I've been for this for how many years. You all know I've been saying it. They should own their autograph. They should own their picture. They should own their name; it's theirs. I've been for this for a long time. Now we're into how do we do this.

We cannot damage the Olympic sports. We cannot do that as a solution. In other words, I'm hearing, well, you'll have eight sports. No. No, they tell me, well, you prepare your kids for life after, you're teaching them adversity, you're teaching them about celebrating each other, teamwork. You're teaching them about conflict resolution and how to respect each other, how to be involved and create joy and all -- do you think I'm the only coach doing that? You don't think the track coach is doing that? You don't think the softball coach is doing that? We're all doing the same.

The kids that have a chance to go through an athletic experience are going to have more success. They just are. I'm not saying anything else is a disadvantage, but I'm telling you, we can't take it away.

The second thing I'll tell you with Olympic sports. Real simple: Olympics. Olympics. Like we've had -- our track program has prepared for the Olympic team stars that have won medals, basketball the same.

We need to make sure whatever we do is done thoughtfully and not just for one program or two programs. This is going to have 18 affected.

**Q. You mentioned Arkansas, second quarter --**

JOHN CALIPARI: Why do you always talk about Arkansas? But go ahead.

**Q. Why do you always talk about Kentucky? Arkansas never signed three McDonald's All-Americans in one year until Eric did. It kind of looks like one of your classes. What do you think about all the coaching turnover, six new coaches, Mike White moves within the league, it's kind of like football but now it's going over to basketball, too.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Tell me the first one.

**Q. First time Arkansas has ever signed three McDonald's All-Americans. I want to know what you think about Eric doing that, and what you think of those players and what they can do for the program.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, you've just got to win every game and it'll work out fine. He'll do fine. I saw Eric when he coached in the NBA. He was with Golden State, and I walked in in Philadelphia and told him he did a heck of a job with the team. And he was young then. I respect him, and he'll do fine.

What was the other question?

**Q. Six new coaches in the league. You're by far the senior coach --**

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I'm not. Don't say that. Not by far.

**Q. What do you think about all the coaching turnover, Mike moved within the league, and that used to be common in football but now it's happening in basketball. What do you think that says about the league?**

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JOHN CALIPARI: Well, the league, I can remember those first five or six years I was here. It was like trying to get three teams in was a fight. I can remember saying probably five years ago, we're moving to where we can get six and seven in the league. We've come to that. Maybe eight or nine now.

What's happened is the TV network, which has helped all the sports, not just football and basketball, it's helped all the sports, but it's also generated financial support for the programs, and many of the teams in our league invested in basketball. They invested in facilities. They invested in coaching salaries. They invested in travel, in recruiting budgets. You won't believe this: That changes things.

I know they get mad when I say coaches win games, administrators win championships. What's your investment? What are you willing to do? What do you want us to do?

Now, the problem is when they really invest, you've got to win. Not everybody is going to win. If you don't win, you've got a lot of change. But that's part of it.

There's been great investment in basketball, and what that -- like I always say, be careful what you wish for sometimes, because now it just changed things. Now you were under the radar, you're fine; now all of a sudden, no, you're in the same boat as all of us now.

But for me as a coach, knowing who we've got to play this year and how good their teams are, how solid their programs are, how invested the universities and the athletic departments are in those programs, the level of talent, like you can't say, well, Cal, you've got all the guys, you should -- what are you talking about? We've got really good players, but so does everybody else now.

**Q. You have Oscar Tshiebwe returning to Kentucky as unanimous National Player of the Year. He elected to come back to the school --**

JOHN CALIPARI: I'm trying to get him to come back next year, too, but go ahead.

**Q. Should the NBA have a higher demand for more seasoned players who dominate the college game?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, the issue became where was he projected to be drafted, and that's part of the reason, and NIL, which I've said to all you guys, the NIL will keep kids in school that would have left. That's what's happened in men's basketball.

With him, if that didn't happen, he would have gone. If he

would have been drafted or projected in a better position, he'd have been gone.

Now it's our chance for him to say, all right, you came back, you've got to be better as a basketball player. We know you rebound -- you've got to be able to guard multiple positions. You've got to be able to pass and dribble. You've got to be a better basketball player.

We had pro day, and everyone left saying he's way better than he was. Like he's way better as a player than he was. That's why you come back. Are you ready? Yeah, don't come back. You're coming back for a redo, you shouldn't come back.

**Q. Kentucky and Arkansas this year playing twice in the regular season for the first time in nearly a decade. Do you think that's --**

JOHN CALIPARI: I voted against that, too, by the way, but go ahead.

**Q. That kind of answers my question. Is that good for the league? Do you think that's how that series should be moving forward?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Now they want to do it in a rotation, so it won't -- and when you add two more teams, unless you do two sides, which never works -- but it's good for both programs. It's great for our league.

You know, it's changed because I don't know if you all know that RPI, if you remember it - may it rest in peace - it mattered what the other team's record was and how good or bad they were. It mattered. With this new NET, it doesn't matter as much.

You play somebody that's not quite as good or they're at the bottom of our league, even though they're good, it doesn't affect you in a bad way now. Playing the better teams is probably better for you, but it's not the same.

It's whatever they choose to do in our league, I'm fine with.

**Q. It's no secret you guys have always been judged by how deep you go in the NCAA Tournament, but as a league, the league has had so much success lately. Does the standard need to be changed there a little bit, not just how many teams but how many advance and how deep, because there were some early exits last year.**

JOHN CALIPARI: Who?

**Q. Auburn, Alabama --**

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JOHN CALIPARI: You can say it, Saint Peter's beat us. It happened.

First of all, I really didn't think someone would ask me the question about Saint Peter's. But let me say this: They were like my UMass teams. They were undersized, tough as nails, skilled, had a coach that had a swagger. Shaheen did an unbelievable job. They beat us in overtime.

We had a heck of a year last year. I thought we kind of maxed out. We got injured at the end, lose to them in overtime, and basically, for me as a coach, dealing with it, because my teams usually would advance and hadn't been -- but I had to worry about my own team, for mental health and not going in dark places and meeting, sitting and hugging. I mean, that was ridiculously hard for our guys, because we did have a good year. We had a bad finish.

I would say we're all judged by how you do in that tournament. I'll give you an example. We went to Kansas and beat them pretty good. And they won the whole thing. We were like, what's happened? This is crazy. Attack me, attack my kids and all this. It's a one-game shot. I wish it was best of three; can we change it? But it's not best of three; it's a one-game shot. So yes, we will be judged.

But let me tell you, to get seven, eight teams in, you're judged for your year, and we need to keep getting six and seven teams and eight teams in this thing, nine teams when we add some other people.

Then we've got to figure out how do we do that. How do we not just beat each other up, how do you not put a schedule together where you add Gonzaga and Indiana and there's Michigan and all the teams that we're playing, I guess.

The other side of it is, if you play those teams, does it better prepare you to advance in the NCAA Tournament. My teams have always played hard schedules. In a normal situation, it helps. Sometimes you have an injury or two, like we did, and it kind of screws up your plans.

Did that answer your question? No. That's okay.

**Q. Biggest improvements made by Jacob and Oscar or what?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Well, Jacob, we have a machine that's called the Noah machine in our gym overtop of the baskets. So when guys come in to shoot, it has face recognition, and they get in there and shoot on their own or with a manager, and you count the number of shots that

they take.

So Jacob leads the team -- he had 2,800 shots in how many -- was it a month or three weeks? What was it? Three weeks? So he had 2,800 shots in three weeks.

He is living in the gym. Every player that I've ever coached that lives in the gym had breakthroughs. They had breakthroughs.

Now we're trying to get him to more car crash. You know what the car crash is; you drive, you create the car crash. You're not getting T-boned; you're T-boning that dude.

When he does that, what happens? He plays really good, but what else, Sahvir? Gets hurt and grabs his shoulder, his knee, all that. So he's got to get through all that to say, yes, I'm shooting the ball way better, I'm handling better, I'm more confident, but I'm not playing on the perimeter; I'm going to drive this thing and be in some car crashes.

He jumps -- how many inches did he jump? What was it? 45 inches. Well, go in there. Jump 45 inches.

He's doing great. He's defending. He's talking. He's grown up. He's gone from 13 years old to probably 16 now, maybe 17. He's matured.

I'm proud of him. I get on him now. I'm holding him to a high standard because he's here and I'm seeing this. Like why not be that guy? Why settle for making some jumpers or I can make a three now. So? Go be that other guy that dominates other league.

Oscar you asked me about. He's a better passer. He's a better dribbler. He has a better feel. He talks. Offensively he knows the plays better. I don't think that Sahvir picking up full court will get smashed now because he knows to go up there and yell and do stuff. And he's authentic, fellas. He is who he is. Like I'm a sinner. I know I'm a sinner. But when I'm around him, I really feel like a sinner because this kid is who he is, every day, like it or don't like it, this is him authentically.

We went to the Bahamas. He was our fifth leading scorer. He's Player of the Year. Unanimously for the first time in a decade. He took the fifth most shots on our team and cheered his teammates. Cheered. They made a three, he's putting up three fingers. He's hugging guys. That's who he is. He wants to win.

Here's the other thing he said. I think it was in an article, and I can't remember -- the article, basically, All these trophies I have have my name on it. All these over here -- there's like 10 of them with his name on it -- I want to win

one where all our names are on it and we can talk about it.

That's who he is. And he really does. Says it, and you're thinking, yeah, okay. That's who he is.

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