

# CBS Sports Classic

Saturday, December 23, 2017

## John Calipari Wenyen Gabriel Kentucky Wildcats

UCLA - 83

Kentucky - 75

JOHN CALIPARI: We got beat and every 50/50 ball. That's why you lose a game like this. You settle for jumpers when you have opportunities to drive the ball, which are harder, it's just harder to play that way. That where's the winning spirit, where's the will to win, where's the tough plays when it's time to do something. Then I'm trying to out trick another coach who can coach, so I'm going zone and I'm switching this, you know my teams have never done that, we just grind it out and play. Today we, I'm trying to do everything to keep us in a game and I don't like coaching that way. We're better than this and let's rack it up to two things: I tried a different type of pick and roll defense, which obviously was really good today -- that didn't work. And I think the other thing is, maybe it was Christmas, but they didn't have that issue and they flew from across the country. And hats off to them, they played well, they made shots they had to make, they made free throws they had to make, Steve did a great job with his team.

### Q. (No microphone.)

JOHN CALIPARI: We left some guys. We didn't go with hands up, there were things that we did and again this is a team that past teams shot like that for him, but this isn't that team, they're more of a 2-point shooting team. Part of the reason we tried to do a little different in the pick and roll defense, but that also opened up threes. Today they made a bunch. I don't know how many they made, but they made every one down the stretch that they needed to make and we missed that one and that two that we had a chance, okay, let's make those, but that's not us, that's, you know.

### Q. Wenyen, how much do you think you gave the team a lift today?

WENYEN GABRIEL: Today I think I was just playing my game defensively, I just had open shots, my teammates found me and I had the confidence to knock them down. Defensively we were trying to run our defense, trying to keep playing with energy, and I just felt like I was bringing my energy to the game.



**Q. You did sort of seem to be a stabilizing force there when things were really going bad for you guys to get you guys back into it. Can you see on the young guys' faces in moments like that, they haven't been through this before and maybe you can be a guy that steadies them a little bit?**

WENYEN GABRIEL: I don't really look at it like that, I just try to up lift my team any moment that I can. Trying to make sure we stay focused, stick with the game plan. We got to drive, we got to listen to what coach is saying. The young guys are coming along, we're getting better every day and I think that with this team through practice and big games like this we just continue to get better. So games like this it's either you win or learn and I think that we learned today and we're going to keep getting better.

**Q. Their guards made a lot of big shots down the stretch. How tough was their back court to deal with today?**

WENYEN GABRIEL: They shot the ball really well today and hats off to them for that. Obviously we got to learn from this and get out to shooters when they're shooting threes and obviously moving on from now we got to limit them threes.

**Q. Was this an example of the growing pains that you said were inevitable for this team?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Yeah, I think sometimes they, as much as you hate to say it, you got to get knocked in the mouth and lose and it's got to hurt every player and then they start figuring out, okay, not going to be able to play the way I want to play. I mean, again, we tried to make the hardest plays when we were in the guts of the game. The pass over the top for no reason, that was a big play. I mean, and again, freshmen make those kind of plays. Have a chance for a layup, I'm going to pull up and shoot this. Why would you do that? That's, the chances of you making that versus that layup is a 40 percent swing. Why would you do that? Well I thought I had it. No, because it's harder to drive. I mean, this is all things they have to learn. Making the easiest play they can make, yeah, but I don't get an ooh and an aww when I make an easy play, I like to make this look away throw over my shoulder pass. That's what we're dealing with right now. You know what, they're getting better. They're so much better than they were a month ago. Today we played a team that wanted the game worse than we

wanted it. This is usually what happens. One team wants it more than the other, one team's willing to fight, one team has a spirit about them, they're bouncier, they're diving for balls, they're playing with more emotion, you are losing that game. So we deserved to lose it.

**Q. You talked about the guys getting punched in the mouth and hurting a little. Is it better now to go on a break and you can let it fester a little or would you rather have them back in a game tomorrow?**

JOHN CALIPARI: No, I'm not looking forward to seeing them tomorrow, so that's fine. But they're probably not looking forward to seeing me either. This thing that we're doing, this is really hard with young kids and no real veteran leadership. I mean, UCLA had three guys that played in that Sweet 16 game and played a lot of minutes. They had three guys in that Sweet 16 game against us. So now their freshmen helped them today. Their freshmen did what they were supposed to do. But their veterans were the guys that really hurt us. So we can use that as an excuse, we never have before, or we can step up and perform better. Probably played some guys too many minutes, Quade just seemed out of sync and I don't know why, both on offense and defense. So it wasn't his night. We needed him to make some baskets. We really did. But that's okay. They're not machines, they're not computers, they don't play great every night out and as a coach all I'm thinking about in a game like this is how do I keep this thing close, see if we'll have a will to win if we got it close. And we did and we didn't have it. That's what I'm disappointed in, that we had a chance to just grab the game. They were kind of teetering. We went to the zone, we did, they were teetering. We had a chance to grab it and we didn't. But that -- they're freshmen. They don't know yet.

**Q. Do you seem a little bit surprised by the performance today, I know in some ways?**

JOHN CALIPARI: A little bit surprised by what?

**Q. The performance today. Did you feel like you were trending in a better direction?**

JOHN CALIPARI: We had a great shoot around today, but it shows you, you just don't know. They're young. Who knows what they're thinking. Oh, we made it, we're a Top-10 team. What? We're good. I'm going to get mine. I'm, watch me today on CBS I'm going to -- you don't know what a 17 or 18 year old is thinking. I have no idea. Obviously, we need guys with more of a mentality of a will to win and blocking out everything else. Hopefully we bounce back from this, but again we got, I told them the next four games we play, we can lose every one. You don't play with the will to win, you don't come up with balls, and even if you do, you could still get beat by the teams we got to play coming up to

play.

**Q. You mentioned their veterans, Aaron Holiday was one of them. How much of a difference did he make down the stretch in your opinion?**

JOHN CALIPARI: Big, it wasn't even down the stretch, the whole game he kind of controlled what they were doing. We just kept -- we screwed up on the pick and roll assignments like 10 times and he either got a layup or threw the ball for a three. We were trying some different things and the lesson for me as a coach is when you got really young players, like do one or two things, that's it. Don't try to invent stuff that should work, because they just -- they're not ready for that. They could play it one way or two ways and if it doesn't work, then stop, you ain't winning the game, move on. But they, he was really good today.

**Q. How was the experience at the World War II museum?**

JOHN CALIPARI: I don't know what it was for them, but I did it because I wanted to go and I said you're coming with me. So I tried to explain some things to them the Normandy, D-Day landing. I tried to explain the Battle Of The Bulge. I said you probably would hear this at some point, I tried to explain Bastogne and how that was and there were things that I asked them, you know, I asked them what things would they know. They knew about the airmen. So it's just, you just want them to be, to acknowledge that we had a chance of losing that war and all of our lives changing and these men, what they did -- and that museum being it's very vivid the videos, where you could see. Some of it where they're in snow and they're trying to fight and it's -- I wish I had five hours, I would have enjoyed five hours. We were there about an hour. But I think it was good for them.

**Q. Quade had a real good game against Virginia Tech. Today not so much. What happened there and how much did Wenyen look like Derek Willis for you today?**

JOHN CALIPARI: He's getting better. Wenyen is getting better. I don't have an answer for Quade. I feel bad for him. But, you know, one game they play well, the next game they may not. Then it's like, you know, their responsibility is to come with a fight and an energy and a fire to play, not, "I want to play well," no, just come to fight and play and battle. Your shots aren't always going to go, but when you're not making shots and you're getting beat on defense, you can't be in the game, it doesn't work. So it was not just that he didn't make shots, he was struggling to guard.