

Head Coach Bruce Pearl
Auburn vs. Kentucky
Jan. 16, 2016
Auburn Arena

Opening Statement...

“Great effort by our team, and great effort by our program. When you beat a team like Kentucky, all of a sudden you have an opportunity to be nationally relevant even if it is for a very short period of time. I am really happy for our school, our university, and our administration. Its just that kind of win. You saw the students. You saw the way they were engaged. You saw the support, and you saw the environment. ESPN saw the environment. This is a good home court environment, and a big game in college basketball. I thought our kids, in spite of losing two last week, came back and had two of the best practices we have had all year long. It was probably a good time to get Kentucky. We needed a game and an opponent like this to give us a chance to feel better about ourselves. I thought our kids did a good job of competing, and I thought our coaches put an outstanding game plan together. We thought that if we could prevent Kentucky from getting to the middle of the floor, and the way we guard ball screens, we thought it would bother them based on the tremendous amount of success they have had all year long. Nobody guarded them quite like we did and I thought it bothered them especially in the second half. The efforts of Kareem Canty and Tyler Harris, those two kids from New York stepping up. You could just see their heart. Kareem turned that ankle pretty good. That thing rolled almost all the way to the floor. Yet he stepped up, and I hope we get him back for Tuesday.”

On Kareem Canty's toughness...

“It says a lot about his toughness with the matchup with a great guard like Ulis, who almost had a triple-double. Tyler Ulis is a great player but he was obviously the focus of a lot of what we do. I thought our inside guys did a good job not letting the inside guys get after them. They still had 18 offensive rebounds, and they still get 40 percent of their misses, so it is a very athletic team. I thought we showed composure and made plays down the stretch, and let our best players make plays down the stretch. Tyler making open shots is an enormous difference for this offense. I am very excited about what he did and what that is going to do for his confidence moving forward.”

On coming back after being down by 12 early in the second half..

“I don't think we panicked. I thought we got our second wind a little bit defensively and put a few stops together. We stopped turning it over. I thought we did a better job of valuing possessions. We can play better offensively. I thought there were some times when some extra passes could have been made. We competed, and we weren't intimidated by the moment. I think part of it is the strength of the schedule we have played. We have played against some really really good teams. Kentucky is a really good team but it wasn't anything that was going to overwhelm us. But just from a standpoint of our program to be able to notch this win and to know that we can compete and for

our young players to do it and be involved in it, and for our student body. It is a big weekend for football recruits and a big weekend for us too. We had a lot of prospects here and they got to see a phenomenal environment.”

On Cinmeon Bowers’ performance...

“He was terrifically active. He played hard, and being such a powerful man, he played like that. That gives him a chance to play some at the next level. He has to play smarter and be more efficient, and he has to keep that same energy and effort and keep that will to win. We are going to celebrate, but we have practice tomorrow. We have to make sure those guys get off their feet. I thought we got great leadership from our upper classmen.”

On Tyler Harris making an adjustment the second half...

“I thought he did a good job getting over that right shoulder with his left hand. I thought those 11 rebounds were huge. He mixed it up in there physically against their inside players. Tyler was a terrific shooter in high school. He was a pick and pop guy, and he was a Euro-4, that’s who he was. That’s who he can still be. He will always compete, and he did a good job finishing.”

On Horace Spencer’s blocks...

“When you play a team like Kentucky, they let you play. Horace doesn’t get in foul trouble because they are blocking our shots and we are blocking their shots. Because of all the athleticism, as a result it was a very aggressive game because they just let them play. So Horace benefitted by that and you could see his athleticism and how engaged he was.”

On Tyler Harris getting his edge back so quickly...

“We worked really hard on it and it was important. I told you after the game that Tyler had come to me afterwards almost apologetic. He has nothing to apologize for. He had a bad night. He came here to help us do things like this. We hope we can build on it, but this is why he came and he delivered.”

On upsetting a ranked team...

“It gives us the hope. It’s not just what took place on the court. It’s in the stands and it is in the following. It does help with recruiting because it does send a message to a lot of really good prospects that have signed and are committed that we have warranted their belief of what we can do. We still have our issues, but this is a good step forward. This is a great win.”

On facing adversity, but still getting the win...

“The thing that I have been praying for is not so much he success and wins, but that God would help me keep these guys together. It is so hard when you are not winning and you are not having success. Adversity reveals character; it doesn’t build it. I challenged

our character to stay together and continue to believe. Our guys were very engaged all of them, and this is a great team win.”

On taking the win in...

“I’m happy for our students because I haven’t been able to provide that return on the investment yet. But when they see moments like that they say, ‘Okay, our basketball program is competing despite of injuries or challenges.’ It took special effort, but I wanted to be able to see that celebration. I didn’t want to be in the middle of it because I didn’t want to get killed, but I wanted to watch it and I wanted to see those guys enjoy themselves.”

On significance of beating Kentucky...

“When you beat Kentucky, North Carolina, Kansas, or Duke in college basketball it is significant. John (Calipari) is going to go in the locker room and say I told you you were going to get a different team than you have seen on tape, they are going to be excited and the crown was going to be there, this is going to be a good learning lesson. Kentucky played hard and they competed, but what the home crowd does to some teams on some nights it elevates you. Our play was elevated tonight. I do think a lot of the guys played tonight for the name on the front of their jerseys. They played for Auburn tonight. They were aware how many years it has been since we have beaten Kentucky. They felt prepared. Our coached did a good job with the game plan, and that gave us confidence.”

On Kentucky being more vulnerable...

“They don’t have a go to inside presence against some defenses. They become a brilliant ball screen team. They do phenomenal work out of their ball screens. We happen to defend ball screens well because we run a lot of ball screen offense ourselves. We work hard on defending it. From a standpoint of the matchup, tonight was a matchup that played to some of our strengths. Kentucky has so many young players, and they are going to compete for a league championship. There is no question about that. They played hard. Our play was just elevated tonight.”

On Derek Willis...

“He was a big factor and a big factor in the game plan. You have to factor him in because again, he is that Euro-4, that stretch four. He made some big shots for them. When he is on the floor it really stretched the defense and opens up those driving lanes.”

On Cinmeon Bowers...

“You don’t want to suffocate them. You don’t want them to not be who they are. You want to coach them, train them, and teach them. And yes, kids do the darnest things. Before Cinmeon came in and talked to the media yesterday, the legend Chuck Gallina gave him a clinic. I talked to Cinmeon on the phone and I said, ‘Chuck, call Cinmeon before he comes in here’ I said, ‘Cim, these are the things you should think about talking about.’ Do you now understand my pain? At the same time, you love him for

who he is. You love the big heart and the energy. The only thing I would say to you guys is this: keep in mind you are dealing with young people. I think you guys do a really good job with that. Occasionally a young man, when the cameras aren't there, is going to say something to you. You can walk away and say, 'That is going to be front page.' Or you could do what you guys do and knowing he probably shouldn't have said that, and say, 'I'm going to hold on to that one for a while.' You guys are always trying to give me advice on how to coach, so I have to give you advice about writing."

On Kareem Canty during the second half...

"That heart and that will. Understand the respect that you have for the game and for that jersey. That is what brought out Kareem Canty. He grew up in Harlem. He grew up knowing what Kentucky basketball is. Whether or not he dreamed of being good enough to play there, that wasn't for him. He wasn't good enough to play there. And tonight he was good enough to play against them, and it just elevated him and you have to be happy for him."

Cinmeon Bowers, Sr., F

On scoring the last point of the game...

"It felt good. I thought I was going to miss it because I was so happy that we beat Kentucky. It felt good to hit the last free throw and seal the game."

On how the team approached the game in order to win...

"We just came together. We kept God first. We pray every time before we go out on the court. I'm a big believer in God. We just came together and played hard."

On what went through his mind through the final seconds...

"This is crazy. We just beat Kentucky. We just made history. Auburn hasn't beaten Kentucky since 2000, so it feels great. Kentucky is a good team. They're a great team, but I had confidence that my guards would outplay their guards. They're good guards, but I had confidence in my guards."

On his feel for Kentucky before the game...

"I feel like we played hard at Vanderbilt. We just missed a lot of shots. I know what we're capable of. We go hard every day in practice. They lace their shoes up just like we lace our shoes up. We just had to compete."

On the post-game celebration on the court...

"That was crazy. I've never experienced that. It feels great. We have good fans and we appreciate them."

On how it felt to pull down the last rebound...

"Tyler said, 'Calm down. The game is not over.' But I said, 'It's over. We won. There are 0.4 seconds left.' I went hard for that rebound. It feels great. Keep God first and anything is possible."

On how it feels to be in the starting lineup...

"It feels good to be in the starting lineup. I had a couple of issues, but that's the past. I'm worried about the future."

On how this win helps the team moving forward...

"Anything is possible. We just have to come together as a unit and compete. It's as simple as that. Anything is possible."

Kareem Canty, Jr., G

On what changed for him between the first and second half...

"I was aggressive. I didn't get down on myself when I missed a couple of shots that I normally make. My teammates told me to get it going and that I'd be all right. Tyler

cursed me out in the locker room. I just had to calm down. I was too anxious to beat them. Once I calmed down, everything was all right."

On if he called "bank" on an important three-point shot...

"I knew it was going off the glass so I kind of called it. My defender knew it was, but nobody else did because it was too loud."

On what it is about Kentucky that made him so anxious to win...

"First of all, it's Kentucky. Growing up where I come from, there are two things that you dream about. It's either playing for Kentucky or Duke, or having a chance to play against them. I had a chance to play against them tonight while my whole family and the world was watching. I have a lot of people from my neighborhood who look up to me, so I was too anxious to get going in the first half. Once I just calmed down, everything was easier."

On how his ankle is feeling after injuring it late in the game...

"It's killing me."

On how the team's mentality while down 12 points...

"Never quit. We told each other we'd be right here. It's easy to quit when you're down. My track record shows that when I was down, I always quit. I wasn't going to quit and let my team down. We were down 12 with a lot of time to go, but we started slowly itching away at the lead and before you knew it, we had the lead."

On how he feels about Cinmeon Bowers calling him better than Kentucky's guards...

"It feels good. I didn't hear about that until today, but it made me believe I needed to step up to back up his words. (Cinmeon Bowers) says a lot of things, but I actually liked him saying that."

On what it means to beat Kentucky...

"It feels great. If you check ESPN all day, you'll see that. A lot of people think they aren't human or they can't lose. When I actually go back to my room and watch T.V., I'll see that three or four times on Sports Center. That will feel great."

On the opinion that Kentucky isn't as good as in the past...

"We're not the vintage Auburn team. We have a chance to build this program with Bruce (Pearl). Bruce has a track record of beating them, so we took advantage of that and beat them."

Tyler Harris, GS, F

On where this game ranks on a personal level...

"For me, it's number one. Just for Auburn. One of the main reasons I wanted to come here was to have upsets against a teams like this. I just want to continue to help the

program and lead the team to more victories. I always wanted to go to a place where we could win big and turn the program around. I look at this as a stepping stone for where we're trying to get and what is to come."

On his success shooting outside...

"It's just something I should've been doing. I work on it every day. It's something I was born to do. I grew up just being the shooter. Today, my pops cussed at me trying to get me to shoot the ball so I was ready to shoot it. I was locked in today, especially with this being such a big game. I was just ready to lock in, play my game, and do whatever I could to help the team win."

On the feeling of stepping to the free throw line late in the game with a chance to ease the tension...

"It was a great feeling when the seconds are starting to wind down and you're at the line, ready to knock down some free throws to finish the game. It's just a great feeling that we were able to go out there and compete and get a great win against a great team."

On how much game planning Auburn did on Derek Willis...

"We knew he was a great shooter and somebody we had to keep our eye on. We had to guard him like a guard. We had a good game plan. We just had to keep an eye on him in situations where he had an opportunity to get a shot off."

On when the team believed they could win the game...

"After coming off of the last three games, we had the edge on our side of having Kentucky here and at home. We just wanted to get another win and to beat a nationally ranked team. That gave us all the motivation and drive to win this game. We have great fans here at Auburn. That really helps a lot. Being able to play at home and guys being able to step up, getting a big win really helped us."

On the opinion that Kentucky isn't as good as in the past...

Either way, it's a great feeling to have an upset against a ranked team. This is a game we needed on our resume for where we're trying to go and in order to get to the tournament. No matter what team it is, Kentucky is a great team, but the thing driving us to win this game was that they're a ranked team. You want to be able to beat a ranked team."

Kentucky Coach John Calipari

On Derek Willis's contributions...

"I'm really happy for him. He rebounded with two hands, and if you ask me, he moved by all the other bigs. That's my opinion. But now he's got to be consistent with it. I'm just proud of him."

On challenging Derek Willis...

"I think everybody knows, they watch him and they're like 'why doesn't he rebound and just defend then Cal could leave him on the floor,' I'm not like some genius; watching the game, that's what you would say. But there's an opportunity right now because some guys are not stepping up. It's just disappointing when stuff is being said, like last year 'we beat West Virginia by 100.' This year, you know, where's the fight in us. That's what's disappointing. The biggest thing is, and I want to say this in the right way, we have a 12-point lead. I'll go back and look. We have to make winning plays; we don't. My freshmen, first of all like Isaiah [Briscoe] fouling. I'm yelling the whole time 'give him space, don't foul, give him space,' and he pushed up. Did exactly the opposite of what I said. Jamal Murray made about five plays: the lefty throw, the jump ball, the missile from nearly half-court, and he thought that the corner three was the one that hurt us, no it wasn't. We would've never needed that, but here's what happened with him and Isaiah [Briscoe]. Because I got a couple other guys no-showing us, I'm expecting them to be 23-year-old winning basketball players who are 19 and aren't ready for this. But they're going to have to grow up fast if we're going to take this thing where it needs to go."

On Tyler Ulis' guts down the stretch...

"He was good. He's a competitor. I probably needed to get him out a little bit, but you get it up to 12, and 'okay we're ready to bust this open,' and then it's just like three plays. Number one and two. All we said was make them drive the ball and make them score twos. You understand we gave them four threes and they made all four during that stretch? Two of them by a freshman, and one of them by Tyler (Harris). One of them was a bank, okay, that happens, but the other three we gave them a three, why did you do that? But again, winning basketball, knowing what we need to do."

On how worried he should be about the loss to Auburn...

"It's January 16, we're fine. I'm not worried about it. I just want to make some changes to see if guys will respond. If you don't deserve the minutes, let somebody else play. I thought Mychal Mulder was really good today too. That's how he's played, the last game he didn't play that way at Mississippi State. But now, he went out and just said 'I've got nothing to lose, I'm gonna fly and run around,' and he did. I was really pleased with him. But you've got to give Auburn credit now. Those kids got down 12 and never stopped. They made big plays and free throws down the stretch. I mean they're like a typical team that's jacked up to play us, and you got to give them credit."

On defending Kareem Canty...

“We gave six threes up in the first half, that’s why they were in the game. We gave up six threes, and some of them we just had hands down. Again, I’ll have to look at the tape to see where he really hurt us, but he banks a three and you can’t say anything about that, and there was some other stuff that he did. It was a good win for them and a tough loss and road loss. Stuff is going to be a little tougher, we don’t have the margin of error that we’ve had with some of my teams. So when I talk about winning basketball, it matters, it matters. All of those plays that we’ve talked about over and over and over about that you continue to do, came back to hunt us today. It’s not just one guy; it’s three or four guys.

On changes for next game...

“I don’t know. They’re going to have tomorrow off, and come back Monday. The other thing is we’ve got to get back to football practice. All this stuff about the rules about we’re not going to like we’re not going to put hands on them, we’re not going to hip check, it’s done. They didn’t have the stomach to continue it, so we’re just going to go back to like I did in 2013, where we just said put on the football helmets and let’s go. The game’s a physical game; you drive and you get hip-checked that is an automatic foul. Could be on us too. Those are all fouls. Today, the other games I’m watching, I’m not just saying this game, all the games I’m watching. It hurts when you’re not prepared for that, when you’re not practicing that way. So what you do is you go back to practicing that way. Just forget about worrying about fouls, get up and play.”

Tyler Ulis, Soph., G

On defending Kareem Canty...

"I just came out knowing he was a big part of the offense. I was trying to stop him. Late in the game I picked up a dumb foul and I couldn't stay with him and he had some big shots, one off the glass. He had it going."

On what factors went into losing the lead...

"Well, we had people who didn't want to play and a couple bad decisions on the offensive end. They didn't play hard as a team."

On Derek Willis...

"Derek played a great game. That's how you battle. He came running in got on the offensive board, defensive board, hitting big shots. That's how he's supposed to play and he did."

Derek Willis, Jr., F

On losing the lead...

"Honestly, I think it was some bad shots and fouling. I had a hand in one kid's face and he hit that three that put them up by two. I was like 'Man whatever he's just playing' and those things happen. It just comes to a point though where you want to put yourself in that position and we've just got to eliminate those mistakes. We just came up and Auburn took it from us."

On being called on to make a difficult shot...

"I have confidence in myself to make those plays. I'm there when they need them and if not you, just do other things."

On Canty scoring a three on him...

"It happens to people. Sometimes it's like a little donut you can't hit nothing. Tonight he was ready. Before the game, they were talking all this stuff and getting hyped up and came with nothing to lose. They came out with the win."

On responding after losing to a team with a losing record...

"That's every game. You have to know that you're at the peak of college basketball. If you don't have the mindset and almost a little bit of arrogance to come in like, 'I play for Kentucky and I'm better than anyone out here.' But you just have to have that edge over people and tonight they brought it over us."