

Sky Clark always had a feeling Kentucky was right for him



by Larry Vaught

There were times Sky Clark seriously considered playing his college basketball somewhere other than Kentucky.

"But I have always had feeling (about Kentucky). It was back and forth with some schools but deep down I knew Kentucky was the right spot," said Clark. "So I just decided to hurry and announce it (his college choice) so I could start working on what I need to do to be ready (to play at UK)."

Clark is no ordinary player. He has been invited to three USA Basketball junior national team minicamps. He's had a Slam magazine feature on him. He has over a quarter-million followers on various social media outlets. He had over 25 major scholarship offers going into his junior season and was the first player John Calipari called when NCAA rules permitted him to contact juniors.

The 6-2 guard averaged 24.9 points, 5.2 rebounds, 4.3 assists and 2.5 steals per game at Heritage Christian (Calif.) last year while shooting 50 percent overall from the field and 85 percent at the foul line. His family moved to Nashville in the spring and he'll play this season at Enworth High School.

After Clark announced his commitment to UK, he said he was a bit overwhelmed by the national reaction. His father, Kenny, said was "non-stop support from everywhere" about his son's college choice.

"People all around were reaching out on social media, text messages, phone calls," Kenny Clark said. "Until it is done you are never certain (about the college choice) but people were elated based on the responses he has got. It just doesn't get bigger than Kentucky."

Sky Clark appreciated the messages and media attention but did not let that distract him.

"I try to be a likable person. It was pretty cool seeing it (his commitment) put up on ESPN SportsCenter. But I went right back to work and tried to get better," Sky Clark said. "I only take a day off if my body needs it. I am trying to do that more but I love working. Usually every Monday through Thursday I am in the weight room with my coach. He has got me so much stronger from when I got to Nashville until now and that's only going to keep improving."

His father is a former NFL receiver but he made sure his son made his own college choice with no push from him toward any school.

"I gave him my input but at the end of the day it was his decision and I wanted him be a man and



Sky Clark with his mother, Sarah, after he made his commitment to Kentucky that brought "non-stop support" about his decision.

figure it out on his own and come back to me with his choice," Kenny Clark said.

Sky Clark says his parents "instilled" the personality and character he has now in him.

"My faith in God also helped me a lot with that," he said about his character/personality. "At one time I was super, supershy. Probably since I moved to Nashville I found more confidence in myself and who I am. I have always been the same kind, caring kid my whole life but now I am more outgoing and more confident in my own decisions."

Kenny Allen has seen his son become more involved in social justice issues and says Calipari's push to get players registered to vote, his stance on social justice and his numerous charitable endeavors that sometimes involve players also was a "huge deal" to the Clark family.

"Everybody knows what we are about. That is the kind of stuff we stand on," Kenny Clark said. "All that played a part in my son's decision. It was his decision and he has to play there. I can't play basketball. He's got to be comfortable with his choice and we are going to support him and the University of Kentucky. We are fully part of Big Blue Nation and could not be happier with his college choice."

What happened Cats?

While Kentucky football has been underestimated often by national media members the last few years, SEC Network analysts normally were much more complimentary of UK football. However, Kentucky's dismal offensive performance this season now has those same SEC Network announcers and analysts wondering what has happened to the Cats.

SEC Network analyst Chris Doering joked he fell asleep during UK's 14-3 loss to Georgia last week.

"I have never seen a team more content not to lose by more points," Doering said after the game. "It's hard to believe you would not want to accomplish more than they did."

Another SEC Network analyst, former Auburn coach Gene Chizik, blasted UK's offensive philosophy as well

"You don't go into games just to hang around and make sure you do not look bad," Chizik said. "I don't care if it (passing downfield) is risky. You can't win by showing that sort of game plan. If they don't get that fixed ..."

"I don't care what you are good or bad at (offensively). You have to try and push the ball down the field," SEC Network sideline analyst Cole Cubelic said.

Former SEC quarterback Jordan Rogers said UK has to find a way to balance the offense with passing yards.

"If you cannot take the top off the defense or even threaten to do so, you are going to get teams stacking the box, taking away the short throws and rallying to the run. That's not a recipe for success," Rogers said.

Kentucky has scored 13 offensive touchdowns in six games. Six came in the overtime loss to Ole Miss. In the other five games, UK has seven total offensive touchdowns.

Kentucky is off this week before hosting Vanderbilt Nov. 14.

Tyrese Maxey

Kentucky coach John Calipari is telling NBA teams that Tyrese Maxey has a lot of the same skills that former UK player Jamal Murray had. Murray was the No. 7 pick in the 2016 NBA Draft and has become a star for the Denver Nuggets.

"Jamal played with Tyler Ulis so (people) said, is he a point guard? They're point guards. We're teaching them to play with the ball and without the ball. And now it becomes: do they make game-winning shots? Are they that guy? Tyrese is," Calipari said.

"Tyrese, physically, athletically, he's a guy who's blocking shots, rebounding the ball, has played dribble-drive and a downhill runner his whole life. He has to be more consistent with his shooting so did Jamal. But they played similar (roles) here."

Maxey is listed as a late lottery pick in most mock drafts and Calipari is warning teams not to pass on him or they will have regrets.

"There are going to be people who'll pass on Tyrese that will regret like how they passed on PJ (Washington), like how they passed on Shai (Gilgeous-Alexander), Jamal

(Murray) and we can keep going," Calipari said. "He's going to be that (type of player)."

Punter Max Duffy

After you win the Ray Guy Award as the nation's best punter, it's hard to top that the next season.

Yet former all-SEC punter Andy Smith thinks that is exactly what UK senior punter Max Duffy is doing this season. He helped Kentucky lead the nation in net punting last year at 45.13 yards per punt and he is UK's career leader at 46.3 yards per punt. Last season 24 of his 49 punts landed inside the 20 and he had 22 punts of 50 or more yards.

In last week's game against Georgia he averaged 42.5 yards on four punts with no return yards and landed punts on the 14-, 8- and 9-yard lines. He is averaging 47 yards per punt this season.

"I do think he is better. You rarely see him mishit a ball," said Smith. "He has such control over different types of balls. He is so good at placing the ball at the corner and having it drop inside the 10-yard line over guys' heads. He just does that so easily and they go down and cover it."

"He was first-team All-American last year and the Ray Guy winner. He is our most valuable player in my opinion."

Smith, who works kicking camps with Duffy, knows the UK standout will have a "shot" to play in the NFL. He noted how Auburn punter Arryn Siposs, another former Australian player, was not picked in the 2020 draft after averaging almost 44 yards per punt. He signed with Detroit as a 27-year-old free agent and is on the practice squad now.

"Whether Max gets drafted or not, I don't know," Smith said. "Some years two or three punters get drafted. Some years they all go as free agents. What you don't see a lot in the NFL is the roll out (punter). They just don't do it."

"Those guys (in the NFL) can have a five-plus second hang time (with the punt in the air) and that is not Max's strength. His is that he is so accurate. He will have a chance without a doubt to get in a training camp. He's so consistent. That's why he has a leg up on anybody else and very rarely does he not put the ball where he wants to."

Smith said there are only 32 jobs for punters in the NFL and he estimates there are probably another 100 punters as good or almost as good.

"It's just a whole different level of competitiveness," Smith said. "Think about it. Only 32 jobs in the whole world for punters. That's why as good as Max is there are still no guarantees with the NFL."

"I can't say enough good about Max on and off field. He's just a great guy and great representative for UK on top of being a great punter."

Sarr is Eligible

After months of waiting, Kentucky finally got word that Wake Forest transfer Olivier Sarr is eligible to play this season. Kentucky assistant coach



Andy Smith, a former all-SEC punter at Kentucky, says there's no doubt Max Duffy, right, is having an even better season for UK this year than he did in 2019 when he won the Ray Guy Award.

Bruiser Flint said Sarr has special skills.

"He's not just a back-to-the-basket player. He can play out on the floor. He can shoot 3's. So, offensively I think he gives you a big guy who can give you some versatility whether it's around the basket or away from the basket," Flint said. "I think he's very talented in that way. I think that he's going to be a big deal."

That's because Flint knows that Calipari is not a coach who wants to live and die by the 3-point shot.

"I know for a fact that Cal likes to post the ball. As much as you shoot a ton of 3s in college basketball now a days, Cal believes that if you don't have a post presence, you're a little bit of a fraud," Flint said. "So we need that, and I think Olivier is going to give us that."

Kentucky Volleyball

Kentucky volleyball is off to a 4-0 start after last week's sweep at Missouri and two of the team's best players are setter Madison Lilley and libero Gabby Curry.

With the new COVID-19 protocols, both could return to Kentucky for a fifth season of eligibility if they want. Curry admits they have been thinking about that already.

"My senior class has talked about it. To be completely honest, I am keeping all doors open right now. I am not closing any door. They are all swinging wide open," Curry said. "The coaches would love for us to come back and have said that."

"I am so thankful they have the willingness to make everything work financially if we do decide to do that. We'll just see where things go job-wise after graduation. If God opens a door, I will walk through then."

Curry will finish her Master's degree in May and will be doing a business internship in the spring.

"I get the best of all worlds. I will be in school with my team, interning in the business world and also getting to play volleyball," Curry, a two-time SEC libero of the year, said.

Senior basketball player KeKe McKinney has also been thinking about using an extra year of eligibility.

"I have actually put a lot of thought into it, and that is something that I am considering. I am going to leave it open," she said. "I don't want to make any

final decisions right now, but I am definitely interested in coming back for another year."

Cats & Cards

Kentucky coach John Calipari and Louisville coach Chris Mack have exchanged a lot of "friendly" barbs about this year's game and when and where it would be played.

Kentucky women's coach and Louisville coach Jeff Walz are not going to play their annual game this season but there has not been the animosity like what there has been with the men's game even though both the UK and Louisville women could be top 10 teams this year.

"We definitely are pushing that game back a year. I think it was just a casualty of the pandemic and COVID-19. I think the ACC settled in on 20 games and that certainly puts some pressure and compression on the schedule," Mitchell said.

"In talking with Jeff when he and I had a conversation, it is an important game for our Commonwealth and an important game for our program. They are always such a challenge each and every year and tough and we obviously profit by playing them."

That's the right attitude. If logistics make it to where the game cannot be played, accept it and move on with no harsh words because the game is important in Kentucky.

"There are some things that are happening during the pandemic that are not ideal but we have to make the best of it and move forward. We will definitely resume the series," Mitchell said.

Quote of the Week

Quote of the Week: "You might have to ask my parents about that, but I don't think so. Olivier is a common name in France and it's the name of my godfather. He was someone who had a big impact on my parents when I wasn't born yet, so they decided to give me his name," UK senior center Olivier Sarr on if he was named after Laurence Olivier.

He's looking forward to learning from two in-state stars, center Drake Jackson and tackle Landon Young — both fifth-year seniors.

"I want to watch and see how they do business and learn from that," Young said.

However, the big reason he came to UK was offensive line coach John Schlarman.

"He is a good man and a guy you want to play for," Young said.