

Talented Sophomores Wenzler, Castle Rising Stars For UK Golf



by Larry Vaught

In the 20 plus years I have been doing a Sunday morning sports show on WLAP Radio in Lexington we had never had a call asking about Kentucky women's golf. Not one.

That recently changed mainly because of the talent of sophomores Jensen Castle and Marissa Wenzler, both former state high school champions.

"Jensen and I and the other freshmen did not know what to expect last year," said Wenzler. "It turned out to be a pretty good season. I wish we could have shown how good we were in the SEC and national championship (that got cancelled by COVID-19). I think there is a ton more ahead and we can be even better. We have so many people who want to be in our top five and we are all working so hard. That competitiveness makes us all better."

Castle and Wenzler helped UK win two team titles last season and produce the best team scoring average in school history.

Jensen set a single season scoring record (71.88 per 18 holes) and became UK's first All-Southeastern Conference first team pick since 1989 and the first freshman ever to do it at UK. Eleven of her 17 rounds were par or better, the third best mark in UK history despite not getting to play a full season as Castle, a five-time South Carolina all-state pick, easily lived up to being UK's highest rated signee ever.

"I actually came into my freshman year with no real expectations which is why I think I played so well. I am better with no expectations," Castle said. "I know that will change this year so I am just focusing one day at a time. If we have a season, it's going to be awesome because we have a great team and great team chemistry."

Wenzler, who had the second lowest two-day total when she won the Ohio state high school championship, had a 73.18 average last season, third-best mark ever at UK. She had six of 17 rounds of par or better and a sixth-place finish at the Cardinal Cup. She was a top 40 prospect in the 2019 recruiting class.

Despite Wenzler's success, she always felt a "little behind" top junior players growing up and says that made her work harder to beat them.

"Golf can be more mental than anything," Wenzler said.



Jensen Castle had the lowest scoring average in school history during her freshman season at UK and believes UK could have an "awesome" year if there is a golf season. (USGA Photo)

Her older brother went to Wright State — about 20 minutes from her Ohio home — and was around to help her with her game. She improved but never thought about maybe playing on the LPGA Tour before getting to Kentucky.

"I just didn't have the confidence to think that way. I came to school and I felt like my coaches and teammates kind of gave me that confidence I needed," Wenzler said. "For a lot of girls on our team, that's the dream (LPGA). Surrounded 24/7 by players who have that dream, too, helps make me want it more."

Castle admits she's always wanted to make the LPGA Tour and "definitely" will try to go pro when her collegiate career ends.

"I started playing golf when I was 2. My dad bribed me to get me to play. It was super hard but I loved it and by the time I was 6 of 7 he didn't have to bribe me any more and I've never stopped loving golf."

Former UK tight end C.J. Conrad says adjusting to being a graduate assistant coach on Mark Stoops' staff has not been that difficult because of the relationship he developed as a player.

"One thing that I really liked about coach Stoops was (how he was) with our senior class. He treated us with a player-coach relationship, but he was very good about taking our opinions," Conrad said. "Coach Stoops is really good at interacting with his players and if he trusts you, he's going to ask you for your thoughts."

"Now that I'm on the coaching side, it reminds me how things were my senior year because that was our kind of relationship. We trusted each other and we can have honest conversations with each other. It's about the same that it was my senior year so it's good. It's good to be back and I love working with coach Stoops."

Conrad should be able to offer helpful advice to players dealing with injuries since he had several at UK and then his NFL career was derailed when a heart ailment was discovered at the NFL Combine.

"There were a lot of times where I just wanted

to give up on myself and just feel really sorry for myself but at the end of the day I did get an opportunity. I'm blessed to get that opportunity because there was a second there that I didn't think I would have a chance (to play in the NFL)," Conrad said. "Now, did I get the best chance in the world? Maybe not but I still got an opportunity and I'm extremely thankful for that."

Conrad played with current UK tight ends Justin Rigg, Keaton Upshaw and Brenden Bates. He has been impressed with what he's seen from them since joining Stoops' staff.

"I was really impressed with how they look physically coming off the quarantine and how they've done a good job of staying in shape," he said. "I'm impressed with (redshirt freshman) Nik Ogenovic as well. He looks very good. He's put on a lot of weight. There are four guys that can start on day one and I'm very impressed that."

Former Kentucky players certainly made a big impression when NBA play resumed. Devin Booker was sensational in eight games as he had 27 or more points in seven of the games and his "low" game was 20 for Phoenix during its 8-0 run. He also had 48 assists and 39 rebounds.

Keldon Johnson might have been the biggest surprise when he averaged 26 minutes, 14 points, five rebounds and one steal per game. He hit 11 of 17 3-pointers. Not bad considering he only played in nine games — he spent most of the season in the G League — before play resumed.

However, don't overlook what Bam Adebayo did with Miami during the entire season. He became the second youngest player in NBA history to average at least 15 points, 10 rebounds and five assists per game. The youngest was Hall of Fame Oscar Robertson in the 1961-62 season when he averaged 30.8 points, 12.5 rebounds and 11.4 assists per game. His career ended in 1974.

Adebayo is one of three finalists for the league's most improved player in his third season. He's averaging career-highs in points (15.9), rebounds (10.2), assists (5.1), blocks

(1.3), steals (1.1), and minutes (33.6).

Remember the recruiting pipeline to LaGrange, Ga., that Kentucky coaches Rich Brooks and Joker Phillips got going that brought Wesley Woodyard (2004-07), Braxton Kelley (2005-08), DeMoro Ford (2005-08), Tristian Johnson (2009-13) and Joe Mansour (2010-13) to Kentucky.

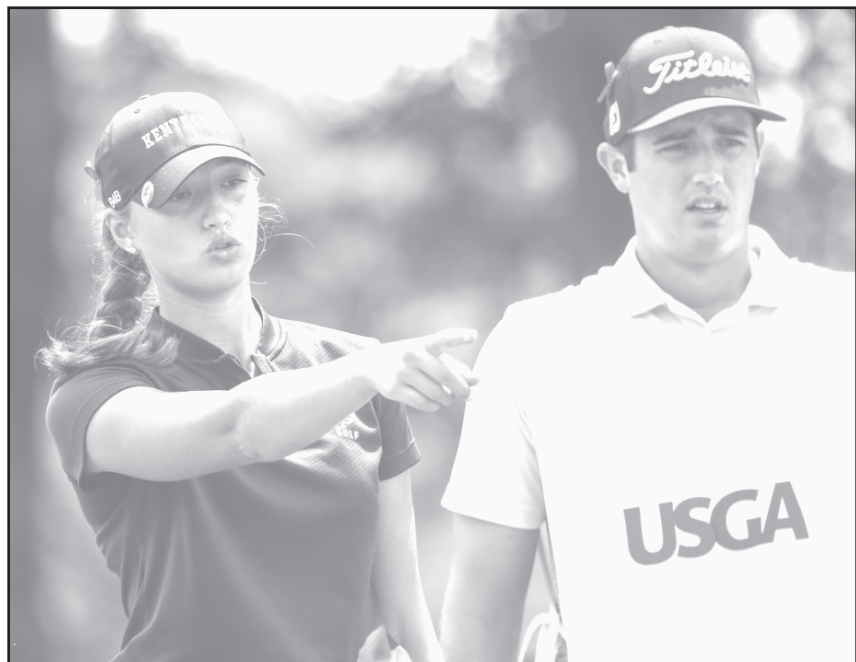
But the first star player Kentucky got from LaGrange was actually receiver Quentin McCord, perhaps the most under appreciated receiver ever to have played at UK from 1996-2000. McCord caught 112 passes for 1,743 yards and 15 touchdowns in his career, including 45 receptions for 799 yards and six scores as a fifth-year senior in 2000. He got to play with both Tim Couch and Jared Lorenzen, two of the all-time best quarterbacks at UK. McCord is top 10 all-time at UK in career receiving yards and receiving touchdowns.

McCord died last week at age 42. One of his former teammates, running back Anthony White, knew he had been experiencing health issues for some time.

"I played with him two years in 1998 and 1999 and he was very under appreciated. That's why I always bring his name up in conversations," White said. "He dropped a few balls but when he did catch it, he was great." How fast was McCord? He had an 80-yard touchdown run against South Carolina in 1998, an 80-yard touchdown catch against Vanderbilt in 1999 and a 75-yard touchdown reception against Georgia in 2000. He's the only player in UK history with 80-yard catch and 80-yard run according to Corey Price of UK Athletics.

However, the play I'll remember most was at LSU in 1998 with UK facing a third down and 12 from its own 24-yard line. He went 38 yards on a reverse to set up the winning field goal in a 39-36 win — UK's first road victory over a ranked opponent in 21 years. That helped propel UK to a berth in the Outback Bowl.

White said he actually suggested the reverse to coach Hal Mumme to get



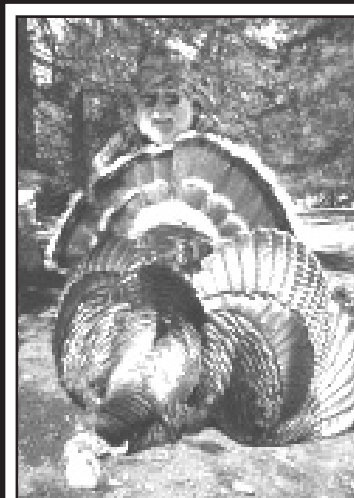
Kentucky sophomore Marissa Wenzler had her brother caddy for her at the recent United States Golf Association Women's Amateur. She played well enough last season at UK to now believe she can reach the LPGA Tour. (USGA Photo)

UK in field goal range. White has rushed 15 times for 43 yards and two scores and caught seven passes for 59 yards. Derek Homer had also rushed for 60 yards while Couch threw for 391 yards.

"I knew the fake to me would draw people in and once he got the ball, he was going to fly and it would be hard for the defense to react and stop him," White said. "I actually thought he was going the distance but that set up the winning field goal (of 33 yards by Seth Hanson)."

McCord was a seventh round pick in the 2001 NFL Draft by Atlanta and had 23 catches for 427 yards and one touchdown in three seasons. He played three more years in the Canadian Football League before finishing his career in the arena league with the Kentucky Horsemen in 2009.

"It never seemed like he got the respect he deserved for the catches and big plays he made," White said. "He deserves more respect for what he did and anybody who played with him knows that."



Just Hunting
by Steve Brewer

As I write this story, the first thing you should know, I don't have permission from the owners to write it. But sometimes it is easier to ask forgiveness, than permission. So here goes.

My daughter, Nema Brewer - Candy, and myself love to spend time together; hunting and fishing. Since nobody has offered me a place to squirrel hunt in this county, we have just been fishing. We headed to Lake Cumberland striper fishing in July, and was back at the dock before 8:00 a.m.

We have found a nice place to fish here in Estill County, it is called Ray's Hog Holler Pay Lake. It is located on Highway 3566, Frames Branch Road, on the Estill, Powell county line (off KY-2001). The people are friendly, the lake is clean, and their price is within anyone's budget. It is in my opinion, a class act. I love the peace and quite, fishing with Nema; except for the coon dog on the hill that never stops barking. But that is life here, and just a reminder, the owners have no control over the dogs barking nor the loud cars and trucks that pass by ever so often.

Ray's Pay Lake is the place to go, enjoy your day, enjoy your fishing; and knowing you can enjoy it all day long. They are open 24-7, they carry almost a full line of bait, and snacks. We love how friendly everyone is, how clean they keep the lake, and the many nice people we have met there. I have met the owners, a family-run business, and they have always been what us old people expect from a business, just great people. I have never introduced myself to them, but I hope to do that on my next trip, which should be next Friday. They also keep the lake well-stocked, putting in fish on Thursday, and Saturday. If this story has upset any of the owners, please forgive me. If you like this story, please tell everyone, if not, please tell me.

Till next week, please take a child hunting or fishing, you will never regret it.

You can email Steve Brewer at <Steve@EstillTribune.com> and message is forwarded.