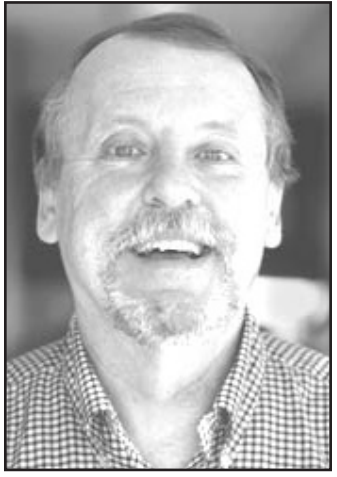


Fans Will Be Talking About Monk Against UNC For Years



by Larry Vaught

Kentucky fans are going to be talking about the game Malik Monk had against North Carolina for years — and should. He was incredible with 47 points, the sixth best scoring game ever by a UK player and tops for a freshman.

What impressed me was

how Monk kept scoring within the frame of the offense and how his teammates knew to keep getting him the ball. “When someone’s hot like that, you just keep giving them the ball. So I’m looking at Cal. He wanted to take him out, he had six in a row already, and he scored again when I was sitting down at the scorer’s table, and I was like you all still want me to take him out? And they changed it, but he had a heck of a game,” freshman teammate De’Aaron Fox said.

He did but so did Fox even though it was almost an after thought because of what Monk did. Fox scored 24 points, dished out 10 assists, pulled off four rebounds and had two steals in 35 minutes. He also had just two turnovers in the fast-paced game.

“Those are games you live

for. We want to play close games, honestly, for me, close games are a lot more fun than blowouts. Just playing against those guys, it’s fun. On the court it’s competition, and I feel like that’s why we play the game, just competition like that,” Fox said.

Fox ended up 9-for-21 from the field but coach John Calipari thought he passed up shots.

“De’Aaron Fox is special. I got on him because he wouldn’t shoot the ball. I mean, I literally screamed across the floor, pointed and jumped and stomped my — you better shoot the — he had three shots he passed up and he dribbled baseline. What are you doing?” Calipari said.

A bonus from this game for UK fans could be that Calipari will return to Las

Vegas to play. Already I’ve seen speculation that Arizona would like to play a neutral site game with UK in Vegas.

“This is an unbelievable arena. Like with the dugouts and the seating and the sight lines and the amenities, it’s really a terrific arena,” Calipari said. “The thing I liked about it for us is maybe it’s another place we travel to because our fans love it.

“I’m not going to Hawaii. So there you go. As long as I’m coaching at Kentucky, I am not. When I leave, the first thing that next coach can do is take a trip to Hawaii. I’m not. No disrespect to Hawaii. I like to vacation in Hawaii. I don’t want to take my team there, it’s too far.”

But Vegas is a lot more doable holiday trip and one I could see Kentucky taking again.



Malik Monk was the star of UK’s win over North Carolina, but freshman guard De’Aaron Fox (above) also had 24 points, 10 assists, four rebounds and just two turnovers. (UK Athletics Photo)

Special Christmas Treat For Kentucky Fans

by Larry Vaught

Kentucky basketball fans have a special Christmas treat coming their way thanks to former Wildcat Cameron Mills.

His documentary, “The Team,” is a story about Kentucky’s 1996 national championship team and the 20th year anniversary the players and coaches held in August in Miami.

That Kentucky team coached by Rick Pitino finished 34-2 and featured nine future NBA players. Mills felt there was a special story to tell about the team but wasn’t sure what it was.

“When you live it, you really do not see it,” Mills said. “That’s the reason media guys like you, Dick Gabriel, Alan Cutler, Chuck Culpepper were there. Your job was to explain the narrative. As a player, all you were interested in was winning the next game and not seeing the whole story.

“But you will see pretty quickly in the documentary that the whole season was toward one goal and no other goal. All we wanted was to win the national title.”

Mills turned to Gabriel, a long-time Kentucky journalist and special products producer, and Jason Epperson, who also directed “Sixth Man: Bluesanity.”

Most of the interviews with players and Pitino were done during the team’s reunion in Miami. Gabriel conducted the interviews that will be seen on the documentary that will start airing Christmas at 5 p.m. The only team member not interviewed was Nazr Mohammed because of scheduling conflicts.

ave some video but not from the tournaments because of who owns the rights,” Mills said. “But the interviews were so great. Coach gave us an hour. Thirteen players were interviewed. The really cool thing was that I did not know what to call this project. In listening to teammates talk, the narrative just came out.

“If you define the word team, there was no better team than this. The size of the egos on this team was phenomenal. Before there was such a thing as one-and-done, we had several that could have been one-and-dones. We had two two-and-dones in Antoine (Walker) and Ron (Mercer). But the biggest theme was how did Coach find playing time for all this talent. He convinced us winning would take us farther than if we did something individually.”

Sound familiar? That’s the message current UK coach John Calipari preaches annually to his team of future NBA players.

Richard Williams was

Mississippi State’s coach in 1996. He beat UK in the SEC Tournament title game.

“They think with nine NBA guys you should just roll the ball out there. But you’re dealing with egos. You’re dealing with guys who know they have a chance to play in the NBA. It takes a superb coaching job to keep those guys playing together,” Williams said during UK’s championship season.

Mills said there are conversations in the documentary about was this team the best ever at UK and could it have beaten the 2012 national title team.

“We also talk a lot about how Coach convince a bunch of arrogant, cocky players who all knew they would be the next NBA talent that their points, assists, rebounds, playing time didn’t matter as much as who wins,” Mills said.

“The pressure really was on us and that comes out in the documentary. I didn’t remember that as much until the guys talked about there was no option but to win a national title. It’s that way at Kentucky every year but that year was coach Pitino’s best chance to get a title and we did not want to be the players to let him down or disappoint our fans and not win.”

Five TV stations originally signed up to air the documentary. The total is now up to seven and Mills is still hoping others may yet come on board.

WKYT in Lexington, WBKI CW in Louisville, WYMT in Hazard and WBKO in Bowling Green will all air the show Christmas at 5 p.m. WQCW in Huntington airs the show at 7 p.m. Christmas, WKYT CW in Lexington at 10 p.m. and WEHT in Evansville at 10:30 p.m. WBKI CW in Louisville will also air the documentary again Jan. 1 at 1 p.m.

“I am so proud of what we have put together. Dick and Jason are such professionals,” Mills said. “I couldn’t be happier with what we have and hope Big Blue Nation really enjoys looking back on Christmas Day.”

One fan definitely anxious to see the documentary is Makayla Epps, the leading scorer on the UK women’s team and daughter of point guard Anthony Epps. She’s seen highlights of her dad from the championship season but can’t wait for the documentary.

“Growing up I got asked all the time if I had seen my dad play. I was too young to actually see him play. I have seen the YouTube clips of big games but I have never actually watched like a full game, so I am going to be all eyes on this documentary. It should be fun,” she said.



A documentary on Kentucky’s 1996 national championship team will be shown Christmas day on various TV stations across the state. (Cameron Mills Photo)

Kemp Back Close To His Collegiate Career in Florida

by Larry Vaught

Kentucky senior running back Jojo Kemp gets to close his collegiate career back in Florida where he was a prep standout when UK plays Georgia Tech in the TaxSlayer Bowl Dec. 31.

Kemp was a freshman start on UK’s 2-10 team but has played a backup role most of the last three seasons. Still, coach Mark Stoops said he loves Kemp and that he’s been an “awesome” leader this season.

“Jojo went through a lot of stuff this year in missing three games or so (with a broken hand) and then coming back every time and having some good games after he was hurt and missed some time. I think he’s that rock in that room. So yeah, he’s been real valuable to us,” Stoops said.

Kemp wanted to get Kentucky to bowl games and winning seasons when he came here to play for Stoops. That finally happened this year.

“The guy is all about team. He’s wanted to go to a bowl game. I think he’s worked so hard to get to that. We talked about it at the beginning of the year, you gotta be humble and you just can’t — there’s only one ball, and I think they’ve handled that well,” Stoops said.

“At times it’s rough because they (running backs) all want it, and I get that, but I think they’ve handled it well. Because you can create a bad cancer in a room. It can get really bad. That has not happened and it will not happen, and Jojo is a big part of that for us.”

Steve Lochmueller came to Kentucky to play basketball and for three seasons did just that for coach Joe Hall. However, after the 1973-74 season, he decided to switch to football for his senior year.

“We had a rough year my junior season. We did not have a true center. It was a learning year for us and coach (Joe B.) Hall. We lacked a big man, a true intimidator,” Lochmueller said. “Basically it was a .500 year for us. We do not talk about that year.

“Due to my abilities and where I thought I might fit in the professional ranks, I went out for football. Coach Hall had brought in Jack Givens, James Lee, Rick Robert Mike Phillips and others. That made my decision to go out for football easier.”

It seemed to be a good move when he earned a starting spot in the defensive line. Then about a week before the season-opening game he hurt his knee, an injury that made him miss seven weeks.

Lochmueller came to UK as one of the “Super Kittens” with Jimmy Dan Conner, Bob Guyette, Kevin Grevey, Mike Flynn, Jerry Hale and G.J. Smith.

He joined a football that had future NFL players Derrick Ramsey, Art Still and Warren Bryant.

“I am not too sure I handled anybody too well. You could see at that point Derrick and Art would be special players,” Lochmueller said. “I was actually intending to redshirt after I got hurt and come back for another year. Instead, I opted to go ahead

and graduate.”

He went on to become a successful businessman and now is the athletics director at Eastern Kentucky University. “At times I wonder if I made the right decision not redshirting. But you live with what you do and I’m really in a good place and happy now,” Lochmueller said.

Quote of the week: Kentucky defensive lineman Jacob Hyde is not a huge fan

of seafood. So he was not overly excited when he found out that UK players would be treated to a seafood dinner in Jacksonville before the TaxSlayer Bowl. However, when he found out it was a buffet, he was a lot happier.

“I am very picky when it comes to seafood. I will only eat two or three things. But if it is free and a buffet, I will figure out something and find plenty to eat. Count on that,” Hyde said.

A Colorful Letter From Former Wildcats Star

Ben Gish of The Mountain Eagle in Whitesburg came across what he called a “jewel” while working on a feature for his weekly paper.

“While going through the December 16, 1946 edition of the paper I saw the attached and very colorful ‘letter to Santa’ from former UK star Johnny Cox. It was written when he was a student at Fleming Elementary School in Letcher County. Thought you would enjoy seeing the letter.” Gish said.

I did. Cox led Hazard to a high school state title and then starred at UK from 1956 to 1959. He score 1,461 points in 84 games and was on UK’s 1958 NCAA championship team. His jersey was retired by Kentucky and hangs in Rupp Arena.

With that in mind, I thought you might enjoy reading the letter a future Kentucky bas-

ketball star wrote to Santa Claus in 1946 and especially one of the presents he asked Santa Claus to bring him.

Dear Santa,
“My name is Johnny. I am in the fourth grade. I am ten years old. It was fun to see you tumbling down the chimney. I am a mean boy. I got four whippings this year. Last Christmas I hung up my stocking and you filled it full. The fire burned a hole in the bottom of it and it all fall out. My dog Rex was playing also around the Christmas tree and it fell down and the ball and it busted.

“I want a cap buster to shoot on Christmas morning. I want a basketball for Christmas — if I don’t I will cry. I go to Neon school. I have a pretty teacher. her name is Delores. you will get struck on her if you see her. Bring her something this Christmas.”

Your friend, Johnny Cox