

Bob Watkins' Sports In Kentucky

In The Nations, countdown to 2 o'clock (2 days post-Christmas), is under way



Bob Watkins

Joy to the world. And Planet Basketball too.

In the Bluegrass State, this Christmas is more than Jingle Bells, Here Comes Santa Claus and goin' to Gran'ma's house.

Family revelry is okay. Mother's chocolate covered peanut butter balls and candlelight service on television is appropriate. But, this Christmas Week drama will carry on well past time the fat guy in a red suit is here then gone home again to sit in front of his fire.

And yes, Planet Earth will continue with its usual suspects — Bill O'Reilly bleating that the sky is falling ... North Korea will still bluster and maybe threaten Walt Disney Studios next. ... Johnny Manziel will continue doing selfies ... and Scarlett Johansson will still try to get naked in public.

But here in *The Nations*, (Big Blue and Cardinal), Kentuckians will open Christmas gifts with an expected "ahhh, thank you," but minds will already be in count-down mode toward Saturday afternoon.

Clocks will tick toward two, Eastern time while Moms, dads and the kids — Fulton to Catlettsburg and Covington to Guthrie, get dressed out in blue or red and promise to keep it sane, knowing they will do no such thing.

Kentucky 12-0, Louisville 11-0.

First, the electronic devices. This ain't church service on Sunday, but ...

- Text and tweets ... suspended.
- Telephones and cell phones ... off.
- E-mail ... nada.

Tune the teevee to ESPN2 and, hey! "Find you a seat, gran'ma, mine's down in the front row!"

Next, the Deuce will channel us to Yum Center where lights will be dimmed and player introductions roll out from the most obnoxious P.A. voice this side of Michael 'Get Ready to Rumble!' Buffer.

Then, Kentucky and Louisville will get it on again. This time the Wildcats are No. 1, the Cardinals No. 4.

According to one teevee expert already last week: "Nobody's going to beat Kentucky. Nobody." Dan Dakich, ESPN.

Cardinal fans would rather ignore the Wildcats' talent, size, depth, defense, unselfishness and growing swagger that produced a 41-7 halftime last Saturday. Realities that have catapulted Kentucky into college hoops' stratosphere, alone. A zone where, despite John Calipari's whiny "shhhh," the words *unbeaten season* have found a way into mainstream conversation, ESPN to CBS and beyond. Louisville? Rick Pitino teams are known for toughness. Is intriguing then, the Dakich key to Kentucky running the table, "is their toughness?"

And so, with all the bone crunch, bruises and tumbles in the movie *Lone Survivor*, Saturday's UK-UofL could be a sequel.

Louisville is a good team. Kentucky is a remarkable one.

Strategies?
 √ Pitino's familiar "press, press and befuddle an opponent into playing faster than he wants," against

Kentucky's rotation, won't work.

√ The Wildcats dozen 3-pointers against UCLA was impressive, but the defense stopped UCLA at 25 per cent is more so. UK's storming transition offense, coupled with bang-it-inside option against Louisville's bigs, will be the deciders. So, open your presents Thursday, Gran'ma, but be sure to reserve a seat in the teevee room on Saturday. Here in *The Nations*, it's Planet Basketball weekend in the Bluegrass.

KENTUCKY-LOUISVILLE

History shows that Rick Pitino thrives on lime-light games like one coming Saturday. His teams don't always win, but his players *bring it*. Emotion-fueled by big stage, they perform at a level beyond themselves.

Question to be answered: Can the Cardinals make it work for 40 minutes against an all-star team? I don't think so.

KENTUCKY. Wildcats are superior at every position, either platoon. Bigger, stronger, better and for more minutes. Even on enemy's court, they should prevail.

Disadvantage? One. Louisville is better coached. Pitino is a 700-plus-wins Hall of Famer for reasons that transcend recruiting and talent. This time it won't be enough.

WKU, UofL 'REWARDS'?

Rick Pitino's (reluctant?) trip to Bowling Green became more Christmas gift than expected. His fourth ranked Cardinals were stretched out, had to play blue collar tough for longer to win a road game.

√ Bode well for ACC road games, the Cardinals had to win without Montreal Harrell who got himself

ejected.

√ Pitino appeared bored then cranky from the outset. At :34 before halftime he lost his poise too, earning a technical foul for barking at WKU's Ray Harper who barked back and earned a 'T' also.

√ Terry Rozier was brilliant, Anas Mahmoud was clutch and the Cards handled their first frenzied crowd and fired up Hilltoppers well enough.

Flip side: Western played the nation's No. 4 team virtually even for 35 minutes, before bumbling down the stretch. Curtains.

What did Western get from the game?

√ An endorsement from 7,598 fans. More than a full house.

√ Coach Ray Harper kept his emotions in check when those around him lost theirs, including a Hall of Fame opposing coach. Classy.

√ Hilltoppers made 10 3-pointers for second game in a row.

√ Left 10-plus points at the free throw line. Lesson? Shooting a gazillion foul shots at practice, matters on game nights.

√ Fans, a Christmas gift. They paid to see a legitimate C-USA title contender play December basketball. By February these Hilltoppers could be Big Dance worthy.

AND SO, CHRISTMAS

If I had a gift (message) to give you, it might be this from Lao Tzu:

"I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness; the second is frugality; the third is humility, which keeps me from putting myself before others.

"Be gentle and you can be bold; be frugal and you can be liberal; avoid putting yourself before others and you can become a leader among men."

Wanderings from the Woods & Water

by Jay Bicknell
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Silent Night

As of lately, I have not gotten to go hunting very much. My new career has been taking up a lot of the hunting time. I might not get to go hunting as much, but my new office is awesome. I spend more time out in God's creation than ever before.

Since becoming self-employed I have spent just about every day working in the woods. My office is the outdoors. No more cubicles or sitting for hours behind a computer.

One of the jobs we have going in Casey County, there is zero cell service. Have you ever went 8 to 10 hours without cell service? Some of the places we are working, if you sit still, all you can hear is silence. The past couple of weeks I have got to watch the sunrise from some remote locations.

Spending all this time outdoors has given me a new appreciation of God's beautiful creation. It's pretty cool to see how his creation works in harmony. I am so blessed to get to work in the great outdoors.

Working in God's creation the past few weeks has got me to thinking about Christmas; a time we celebrate the birth of Jesus. God created the awesome world we live in and then gave us His only begotten son; A child born in a manger on a Holy Night that would one day pay a price He did not owe.

My favorite Christmas song is Silent Night. When I hear that song, I have a feeling of Peace. Celebrating the birth of Jesus is important because the Light of the World

came to be. Don't forget Jesus had to be born to be sacrificed on a cross at Calvary for the sins of man. The only way to the Father in through the Son. This Christmas, take some time out from the chaos and find a silent place and Thank God for his only begotten son.

If you don't know Jesus, now is a great time to get to know him. I have found life is tough but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I want to wish all my readers a spirit filled Christmas. It's not about buying the perfect gift. The perfect gift was born over 2000 years ago and died on a cross so we could have everlasting life. May God Bless You and your family this Christmas. Know Him Know Peace! No Him No Peace!

Until next week, get out and enjoy God's creation.

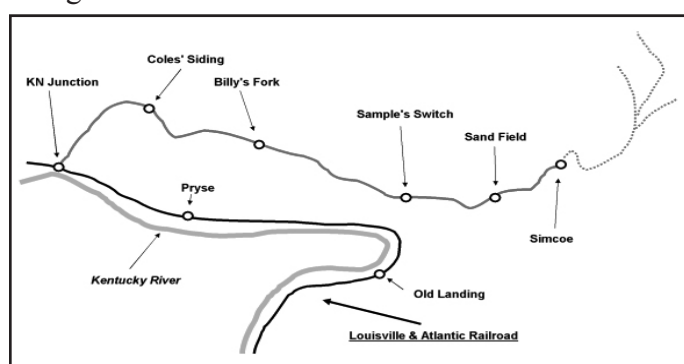


Birding by Season
Winter was filled with migrating sparrows, catbirds, goldfinches and robins. Spring brought cowbirds, wrens, titmice and woodpeckers. Babies, babies everywhere in the summer. Fall had red-winged blackbirds, crows and blue jays. My yard is always filled, and so is my heart.
Happy New Year everyone!
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The Kentucky Northern -- Estill County's "Other" Railroad

By Jerry G. Rose

Estill County's railroad heritage is primarily associated with the Louisville & Nashville (L&N) Railroad which was a fixture in the county for about 70 years. The L&N's association with Estill County began in 1909 with the purchase of the Louisville and Atlantic (L&A) Railroad. In 1899 the L&A had purchased the Richmond, Irvine, Nicholasville and Beattyville (Riney-B) Railroad, which was Estill County's first railroad, arriving in Irvine in 1892.



The Kentucky Northern Railroad line along Miller's and Big Sinking Creeks from the junction with the L&A rail line at KN Junction (near the mouth of Miller's Creek) to Simcoe. The dotted lines beyond Simcoe are narrow gauge rail lines. The dates of operation of the KN Railroad were from 1902 to 1909. Its lines were in both Estill and Lee Counties.

So for over 70 years, from 1909 until the L&N was absorbed by the Seaboard System Railroad in the early 1980s, and soon thereafter by the present-day CSX Transportation, the L&N was the railroad company in Estill County and particularly in Ravenna, the town that the L&N established. And as Ravenna's population grew during the late 19 teens and 1920s, so did the town of Irvine and the county. The development of the railroad's facilities and the concurrent oil boom brought early prosperity to Estill County.

However, a small logging/timber railroad operated for a few years in Estill and Lee Counties during the very early 1900s, prior to the L&N's purchase of the L&A. This was the Kentucky Northern (KN) Railroad, an 8-mile long standard gauge line, running from KN Junction, about 6 miles south of Ravenna at Pryse, on the L&A in Estill County, northeast to Simcoe in Lee County. It represented the only other railroad in Estill

County not a part of the Riney-B, L&A and L&N Railroads. It was constructed in 1902, which coincided with the L&A's extension to Beattyville, by Detroit capitalists who owned 4,000 acres of excellent timber around Simcoe in Lee County and desired a means of transporting their logs to mills.

The line trended in a northeast direction on the southeast side of Miller's Creek. The present day KY 1398 highway follows the KN line from its junction with the then L&A at Pryse (near the former location of Tucker Taylor's store) to the Junction with KY 1571 where it turned east along present day KY 1571 to the Junction with the John Campbell Road. It followed this present gravel road for a few miles on the south side of Miller's Creek and Big Sinking Creek.



Old KN grade just east of Pryse in Estill County, known as the John Campbell Road, at the junction with highway KY 1571.

Numerous remnants of the old roadbed are still visible and easily viewed across the creek from KY 52 in the Crystal area. The old embankment crossed Sinking Creek, about two miles into Lee County. There it joined the present KY 52. From this point present-day KY 52 highway follows the old roadbed to the base of the mountain at Hatton Hollow. Here the rail line turned north following Sinking Creek to Simcoe. In addition to the roadbed, several stone masonry pillars used for bridges along the line are still visible.

At Simcoe several miles of narrow-gauge tracks were built in the directions of Bald Rock and Greely. At Simcoe the logs were loaded on the KN for delivery to the L&A at Pryse. Later a lumber mill was erected at Simcoe to process the cut logs into cross ties, barrel staves and lumber.



Remnants of a stone masonry bridge abutment on the former KN's line across Big Sinking Creek near Simcoe in Lee County. Note the old crude oil pipeline in lower left of the picture.

The KN provided the L&A RR with traffic for the seven years it operated. However, by 1908 the timber business had decline substantially. The line was abandoned later in 1909, after seven years of service. The rail was removed during World War I.

Had the Kentucky Northern remained in existence until the late 19 teens, when the Big Sinking Oil Field of Lee County started its rise to its ultimate position as Kentucky's largest producing area at the time, the little railroad might have enjoyed many years of prosperity. Its terminus was near the heart of this field and it connected with the L&N RR's major Eastern Kentucky line. This could have been used for transporting the crude oil as the L&A RR had previously transported timber and lumber throughout the country.

The KN RR was but one of several standard and narrow gauge rail lines that existed for a few brief years during this period in mainly in Powell, Lee, Wolfe and other nearby counties. They also primarily transported logs and lumber from the area. Many of these connected with the Kentucky Union and Lexington & Eastern Railroads primarily along the Red River and tributaries.

The author is a native of Estill County and resides in Lexington (Fayette County). His father was employed by the L&N Railroad at Ravenna (Estill County) Terminal for 42 years, retiring in 1965. His e-mail is jprose@aol.com.