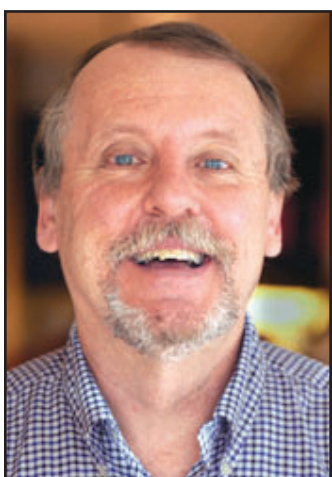


Fox can play himself into a higher spot in draft



by Larry Vaught

Players often come to play basketball at Kentucky now to enhance their NBA Draft status. It's something coach John Calipari sells to players as he points to the draft picks he's had and how well many of them are doing in the NBA.

A player can play himself into a higher spot in the draft — Eric Bledsoe, Jamal Murray, Trey Lyles for instance — that many ever imagined. However, because the spotlight is always on UK basketball, a player can hurt his draft stock with subpar play — remember Skal Labissiere.

While it's still way to early who may go where in the draft or who may even enter the draft, it's never too early to speculate. Ed Isaacson has followed the NBA draft for many years and his NBAdraftblog.com was a go-to site for information.

Now he's transitioning to the agent side of the business, but that doesn't mean he has to keep his opinions about this one last draft to himself.

Question: What is the upside for Malik Monk when it comes to the NBA draft and what he has done to help/hurt his draft stock this year?

Isaacson: "With his athleticism and shooting ability, it's tough to see Monk falling outside of the lottery, or even the top 10. The real question will be is there a way for him to move into the top five or six picks. The most impressive part of his game has been his jumper, but not just the ability to hit shots, but to hit difficult shots, off the dribble or with a hand in his face. Monk doesn't have ideal size for the shooting guard spot, so it's critical that he be able to hit those tough shots. Where Monk has really hurt himself has been with his shot selection, which has been awful at times, as well as an indifference on the defensive ends for long stretches."

Question: Is there any doubt about De'Aaron Fox being a lottery pick? What flaws in his game might worry NBA personnel and is it his speed that NBA scouts like more than anything?

Isaacson: "While there are a significant number of point guards who should be first rounders this year, there is still a lot of jockeying for position to take place. Personally, I think Fox is worth a lottery pick, but the numbers don't always work out that way, and he could just

as easily fall in that 15-20 range.

"His speed, especially end to end, as well as reaction time, has been impressive, but I think his potential on the defensive end is also something NBA teams are liking about him. Being able to knock down jumpers consistently is going to be the thing he needs to worry about the most, and will be the difference between being a starter one day or a back-up (in the NBA)."

Question: Bam Adebayo has been considered a certain lottery pick at times this year. Do you agree? Has he shown enough offensive versatility for NBA personnel and what concerns would you have about him? Isaacson: "No, Adebayo is far from certain at this point to be a lottery pick, and I would be surprised if he does end up there, with the 15-20 spots a lot more likely, as of now. But, as I keep mentioning, there is plenty of time for things to happen, and Adebayo can look to take advantage. Five to 10 years ago, a player like Adebayo would likely be a top 10 player, but with more NBA teams looking for big men who can help spread the floor, Adebayo may get overlooked."

"Now, I remember watching him at Madison Square Garden earlier this year during warm-ups, and he seemed to be knocking down 18-20 foot shots much better than expected, but he hasn't shown it in a game at all."

"On top of that, he's not really a great interior defender, and even worse when he has to come out on the perimeter, and that lack of versatility may make NBA teams overlook him in the first 14 picks. Still, he would be a great value later on in the first round, going to a team where he has time to develop."

Question: Senior Derek Willis obviously can shoot the ball, but Calipari has never been happy with his defense or rebounding. Any chance he gets drafted? Isaacson: "With his size and shooting ability, there's certainly a possibility, but this draft will be particularly deep, and I think the numbers work against him and he'll have to try his luck with the D-League route."

Question: What are your thoughts about Wenyen Gabriel?

Isaacson: "Gabriel has probably been my favorite of the UK freshmen since the start of the year, even if he wasn't really a candidate to come out in the draft this season, though I still wouldn't rule it out. Gabriel has a great combination of size, length and athletic ability, and as his skill set continues to develop, I can see him becoming a very good two-way wing at the NBA level. That skill development — shooting, ball handling, movement — needs to hit the next level this summer. If that happens, he

could have a good shot at the 2018 lottery."

Question: Isaiah Briscoe is perceived as a player leaving for the draft and someone that wants to leave for the NBA. But at his size and limited shooting range, is that realistic? What do you see his draft status as?

Isaacson: "I think Briscoe's ceiling as a draft pick is the second round no matter what, so coming out this year really won't make a difference. As you note, the shooting continues to be an issue, but Briscoe still has value on the defensive end, plus his ability to use his body to get to the basket."

"He's far from an NBA point guard, but the skills are there; his decision-making is a problem, though, and watching these past few games, he seems to be regressing, though I tend to err that he is just putting a lot of pressure on himself to lead this team. I could see Briscoe being a guy who goes into pre-draft workouts and impresses teams with his defense and competitiveness, and I wouldn't be surprised if he ends up as a mid-second round pick."

First Look at P.J.

Kentucky fans can get a first-hand look at future Wildcat P.J. Washington Friday and Saturday nights when he plays in the Kentucky Lake Showcase at Marshall County with his Findlay Prep (Nevada) teammates.

"He has a 7-2 wingspan and is really a tough kid. He goes after those loose balls and once he gets it, you do not take it out of his hands," said his father, Paul Washington, who is also the Findlay Prep head coach. "A lot of that is from coming up in Texas playing football. He loves the contact and UK fans will see that next year."

The 6-8 Washington could potentially play a variety of positions. His father says they do not label him at any position and noted what he could have done against Josh Jackson of Kansas when UK played the Jayhawks in late January.

"A kid like Josh Jackson could really not get by him and physically he could not rebound over P.J. As a coach, it's good to have a player like that on your team," Paul Washington said. "Put a taller kid on him and he goes by them. He leads our team in assists. He has really good court vision and instincts with the ball."

Paul Washington likes the preparation work that Calipari does with players.

"He does stuff I do not see anywhere else in the country. What he has done at Kentucky bringing those kids in and making them playing his way has been incredible. That's not easy to teach," Paul Washington said.

Findlay Prep guard Justin Roberts is headed to DePaul. Paul Washington says that senior Donnie Tillman, a 6-8 forward, and Reggie Chaney, a 6-8 junior, are both solid players and 6-6 forward Lamine Diane is as well.

All five starters average in double figures with P.J. Washington at 19.7 points per game and Diane at 15.8 leading the way.

Then there is 6-7 sophomore Spencer Washington, P.J. Washington's younger brother. He's 6-7 and has been sidelined for about two months with a broken hand but Paul Washington hopes he can play this weekend.

"They are all very unselfish and play well together. I think we are a fun team to watch," the coach said.



Former NBA draft analyst Ed Isaacson says NBA teams like the speed De'Aaron Fox has and that will make him a likely top 20 pick at worst. (Jeff Houchin Photo)

Diallo Next Season

Hamidou Diallo has not played for Kentucky since joining John Calipari's team in January and the plan remains for him not to play until next season. However, he's noticed all the attention UK players get.

"It just shows you that the stage that we're on is a different type of stage. Night in and night out you just got to be the best version of yourself," he said.

He's not been surprised by picture and autograph requests from fans.

"I've seen it. New York is pretty much — it's not the same, but it's pretty much the same. I mean, people have fans everywhere. We're just blessed to have the fans that we have," he said.

He admits he's been asked more times than he could count about whether he would play this year or not.

"I just tell them 'I don't know at this point,' because me telling them the whole story would take a lot of time I'd say," Diallo said.

Kentucky Softball

Kentucky opened its softball season last weekend and coach Rachel Lawson has built the team into a national power during her 10 years at UK. But while she does not want anyone to know it, she's a softie and made that clear when she cried talking about a senior player at Media Day before the season even started.

"She is a softie at heart," UK pitcher Meagan Prince said. "She is tough and intimidating and you can't get into her head, but she has a soft heart when it comes to her girls."

Breanne "Buzz" Ray is another senior who has seen the soft side of Lawson that the coach doesn't go public with often.

"Honestly, I was not surprised she cried. She puts on a hard front for everyone else — I think she has to. But once you get to know her, she has such a love for our team and every player," Ray said. "She cares a lot.



Hamidou Diallo says fans ask him frequently if he will play this year, but the plan remains for him to wait until next season. (UK Athletics Photo)



Softball coach Rachel Lawson hates being called a softie, but her players say that is exactly what she is. (Vicky Graff Photo)

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