

# Hamidou Diallo never lost track of his plan



by Larry Vaught

At times he might have wondered what it would be like to be playing at Kentucky now, but Hamidou Diallo insists he never lost track of his plan.

He enrolled at Kentucky in January intending to red-shirt the rest of this season and then have a head start on the 2017-18 season where he figures to be a starting guard for coach John Calipari's team.

He's a five-star recruit with the length and athleticism that Calipari loves — and will need with the expected backcourt departures of Dominique Hawkins, Mychal Mulder, De'Aaron Fox, Malik Monk and Isaiah Briscoe.

Diallo recently shared a variety of insights on what the past few months have been like for him since he arrived in Lexington.

**Question:** What has the learning experience here been like for you so far?

**Diallo:** "I mean, it has been great. Ever since I have been here I have been picking up on better habits. So it has been great."

**Question:** Has it been harder than you expected?

**Diallo:** "No, it has been just about what I expected. I have got a lot of work and I am not scared to work. Just continuous work and business."

**Question:** Does it help that you already knew several of your teammates?

**Diallo:** "I would say definitely knowing these guys did not make it as difficult. They just took me in and showed me the ropes. Ever since I have been here, they treated me like family."

**Question:** Does being here now give you a huge advantage over incoming freshmen next season?

**Diallo:** "Definitely. I have been here, so those guys coming in it will basically be my job to show them the ropes. For our team to be successful next year, I will have to go out there and be the best I can be."

**Question:** What is game day like for you?

**Diallo:** "Definitely been hard. For anybody that wants to play, sitting on the bench is hard. It has been tough but was something that I planned. Great but tough."

**Question:** Do you catch yourself thinking how you could be helping the team in games?

**Diallo:** "Yes. It's tough not playing."

**Question:** What have you spent the most time working on in practice?

**Diallo:** "Just being consistent in everything I do. Try to be a professional and be consistent every day. Definitely working on the shot. Just be efficient. Working on strength, shot, stuff like that."

**Question:** Can you stop these guys in practice?

**Diallo:** "Definitely. Everybody knows I defend pretty well. I just come in there and compete with them and make sure they are prepared for games."

**Question:** Are you an emotional player?

**Diallo:** "I always have been. I just want to go out there and leave it all on the floor. That's how I see it."

**Question:** Do you consider yourself an unselfish player who likes to pass?

**Diallo:** "That has always been me. I have never really been selfish. I feel like if the team is winning, then I am winning. That's how I see it."

**Question:** How are you and Calipari bonding?

**Diallo:** "Just great on and off the court. He is trying to teach me things to do and getting me out of my high school habits. It has been great the whole time here."

**Question:** Do you still talk to signee Quade Green, a point guard from Philadelphia, a lot?

**Diallo:** "Yes. We talk a lot on a daily basis. He is ready to be here. He wants to get here and start working. He is like my brother. I can't wait for him to get here."

**Question:** Are you two still trying to get Mohamed Bamba to sign with Kentucky?

**Diallo:** "Yes. Hopefully we do get him. I say there is a strong chance."

**Question:** What is the best part of Green's game?

**Diallo:** "Just how unselfish he is. Great point guard and he can do it all. That is how I see it."

**Question:** What about signee Nick Richards, a center from New Jersey?

**Diallo:** "I have played with him, too. He is just a great defender. Catches lobs, blocks shots, great defender. Very athletic player."

## Bitter 75-73 Loss

Kentucky's season did not end the way any UK fan, coach or player wanted with the bitter 75-73 loss to North Carolina Sunday in the South Region final. However, don't forget UK won 32 games, won the SEC regular-season championship and also won the SEC Tournament.

But let's also put one myth to rest — or at least try.

How many times do you read or hear that Kentucky's one-and-done players only care about the NBA and becoming millionaires? It happens all the time.

For anyone that believes that, I hope they got a look at video from the UK dressing room after Sunday's loss. It was pure heartbreak watching freshmen Bam Adebayo and De'Aaron Fox embrace and cry at the same time and certainly showed just how much these players do care about winning and UK.

"The fans followed us everywhere we went. Some away games felt like home games," Fox said after the game. "Today was like that. They had our back all year. I love this program." Same for Adebayo.

"I love this team to death. They are all family to me. We fought together. We just came up short," Adebayo said. "I saw him (Luke Maye) shoot that last shot and I was praying he missed it. It was like all our life got sucked out of us when that shot went in."

Fox wants the team to be remembered for the way it fought. He knows some questioned the team's attitude when it lost three of four games in January.

"Some people said we didn't care. Look around this locker room. We care," Fox said. "Everybody is heartbroken. After Cal talked to us, we broke it down one last time and talked about it. I just wish I could have done more for these seniors."

Fox said Calipari didn't say much after the game.

"It was sinking in with him (that UK's season was over), too. There was not much said in here because there was not much to say," Fox said.

That included about what might lie ahead for freshmen Fox, Adebayo and Malik Monk, all projected as likely lottery picks in the June NBA draft.

"Ain't none of us thinking about that right now. We just took a loss," Adebayo said. "We are going to stick with each other and then talk with family. I am going to worry about my teammates for the rest of this week and nothing else."

## Likes Little Snow

Count freshman receiver Clevan Thomas Jr. of Miami as one who is thankful Kentucky had very little snow this winter.

He didn't own a heavy coat when he got to Lexington and was used to wearing sandals — he said he bought some "furry shoes" — because even a cold day in Miami was about 60 degrees. The first time there was a light snow in Kentucky in January he almost slipped on the ice and fell down stairs.

"I tried to build a snowman one time but it was harder than everybody thinks. On movies you just roll it up but in real life it's no joke. I haven't even been in a snowball fight," he said.

"But I am not disappoint-

ed that we really didn't have any snow. I was disappointed when it was 30 degrees and I was freezing. But recently I have enjoyed the weather. It's real nice. I went back to Miami for spring break and it was scorching hot. I am actually liking the weather here now."

Kentucky offensive coordinator Eddie Gran is also liking what he's seen from Thomas.

"I'll tell you what he does, he battles. He reminds me a little bit of (running back) Benny (Snell) in terms of his mentality and how he's going about it as a freshman. Now, lot of time left and all that, but I sure do like where he's at," Gran said.

Thomas said he's been playing both slot receiver positions and that suits both him and Gran.

"He's actually learning both, which is pretty good for a true freshman. He's getting in there and mixing it up. I do like his toughness. He's got a mental toughness about him," Gran said.

## More on Epps

Makayla Epps might be the most popular UK women's basketball player ever. She just had a connection with UK fans that loved her.

She finished her career fifth on UK's scoring list and eighth in total assists.

Kentucky coach Matthew Mitchell said there was no one thing that made the former Marion County standout so popular.

"One is the person she is, and she just connects so well with people. She has a beautiful spirit about her. She has a great heart for people," Mitchell said. "She, I think, takes that extra few seconds maybe to connect with a fan that might be the only interaction they ever have but she takes the time to connect with people because she cares and she has a caring heart. I think that's a big part of it."

"I think her lineage is important. I think her dad (Anthony Epps) having success here on a really important team (1996 national championship team) in our men's basketball history and people are very excited about our men's team. His success, and then you have a daughter that comes along and signs with Kentucky and goes to Kentucky, I think that adds to that and then the success our program's had."

"She's had some incredible moments here as a player. I think all of that wrapped into one. But I don't think any of that would matter if



Hamidou Diallo knows being at UK this year will give him an advantage next season. (Vicky Graff Photo)

she weren't the person that she is and have the heart that she has for people. I think that's the most important part of why people connect with her."

## Quotes of the Week

**Quote of the Week:** "I think he'll do a great job there. I mean, it's not an easy job. None of these jobs are easy, but that's not an easy job, either, and you have to walk in there wanting that challenge, kind of like wanting Kentucky," John Calipari on Archie Miller being the new coach at Indiana.

**Quote of the Week 2:** "I look up to Dom. I'm always going to him for advice,

especially when I first got here. He waited his turn. He put the work in. He's probably quiet to you all, but when he's around us, he's laughing, joking, and it's just funny because he's so quiet," Isaiah Briscoe on UK teammate Dominique Hawkins.

**Quote of the Week 3:** "We know how good Isaac is. In practice he shoots the lights out. We have a drill where we shoot for five minutes and he makes at least 80 shots. For him to step up in that moment, I'm proud of him, and I knew that he had it in him," Dominique Hawkins on teammate Isaac Humphries scoring 12 points against North Carolina.



De'Aaron Fox and Bam Adebayo showed their pain after UK lost to North Carolina. (Vicky Graff Photo)

**Volleyball**  
**The Estill County Church League Volleyball will start Saturday, May 6th at 5:00 p.m. Call 606-723-6682 for team entry. Deadline for entry is April 28th.**

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