

Immanuel Quickley's first-round selection did not surprise his family



by Larry Vaught

Demetria Caldwell does prayers on Facebook Live each Wednesday and admits the thought of her nephew, Immanuel Quickley, becoming a first-round NBA draft pick was often in her prayers.

Mock drafts didn't project Quickley, the 2019-20 Southeastern Conference Player of the Year, as a likely first-round pick but his family thought the way he performed in pre-draft workouts would elevate his stock.

They also planned a normal draft night gala even though everything was virtual. They made the 2 1/2-hour trip from Maryland to New York City to watch the draft at Roc Nation, an entertainment agency representing Quickley.

"We were like, 'Let's have a ball. Let's dress like we are going to a gala with great expectations,'" said Caldwell. "How you dress is how you feel and we all felt amazing. Everyone at the agency treated us like family. The Big Blue love extended to New York City."

Quickley was drafted in the first round. Oklahoma City picked him 25th and immediately traded him to the New York Knicks. However, Quickley's family did not know his name was getting to be called on ESPN.

"Immanuel didn't want to know so his reaction would be authentic," Caldwell said. "Myself, I was surprised he didn't go first because he's always No. 1 with me. But we knew he would be called in the first round. We had faith. Every once in a while the room would fill up with the Roc Nation family but they never said anything to us."

Caldwell had brought a suitcase full of decorations for the event. The family even played UNO, a card game they all enjoy, watching the early picks in the draft.

"We tried to keep it as fun and stress free as possible," Caldwell said. "Now we were not as focused on our UNO game as normal."

Once Quickley was drafted, his family erupted in celebration and it got even better when they found out he was traded to the Knicks.

"Less than 30 seconds after he was picked they advised him he had been traded to the New York Knicks," Caldwell said. "We are not like neighbors because home is so close. That 2 1/2 hour drive is nothing compared to nine hours to Kentucky."

The idea of her nephew being a millionaire when he signs his first contract is something she says is mind-boggling but also something he can handle.

"The University of Kentucky prepares you for t



New Kentucky women's basketball coach Kyra Elzy had to make her first difficult decision when she suspended All-American Rhyne Howard for the first two games this season. (Vicky Graff Photo)

his. These kids are prepared for the NBA mission. He's used to interviews before and after games. He's been through Big Blue Madness. He's had a ton of experiences," Caldwell said.

"I am so proud of that kid. He is a grown man now. On FaceTime with coach Cal after the was drafted he told coach Cal that so many people said he couldn't do it but he did. His work ethic has been unreal but he's still hungry to go to work even harder now."

She was a fixture at every UK home game — and numerous road games — during her nephew's two years at UK. Most times she wore a pink UK hat that made it easy for fans to identify her.

"I do plan to be at every Knicks home game," Caldwell said. "I have not purchased a pink hat yet but I am already working on my dress. I don't know if they will have a pink Knicks hat but I hope so because I want to stick out and make it easy for him (Quickley) to find me."

UK Radio Network

Due to a Southeastern Conference mandate, the UK Radio Network team of Tom Leach and Mike Pratt will be calling the away games from a studio in Lexington much like ESPN and SEC Network announcers have been doing during football.

"I will really miss going to the shoot arounds before games. I picked up a lot of things I could use and others I couldn't but could still find a way to use in my own words," said Pratt, a former UK All-American and the network analyst.

"It's going to be really different. I honestly do not know how hard it will be because I have never experienced anything like that but apparently all the leagues are going to that. The SEC has the affiliation with the SEC Network obviously so we can get what we need to call the game."

To get ready for the UK-Kansas game he would be calling virtually, Pratt reached out to former UK All-American Kyle Macy who did games for ESPN several years ago from a remote location.

"Macy said it was actually kind of neat and if you have enough televisions you can see a lot of different angles," Pratt said. "Sometimes you go

through life wishing you could have done things, so now I get this chance. I will still be in the same room with Tom, just watching while we are social distancing. Others are doing it so I am sure we can do it also."

Pratt and Leach are still calling games from court side at Rupp Arena, just in a different spot than previous years.

Coach Kyra Elzy

After her brilliant high school career at Oldham County, Kyra Elzy left the state to play basketball for Pat Summitt at Tennessee.

"To my defense, it's hard to say no to coach Summitt, an icon. However, this program (at Kentucky) is in a totally different place than it was when I was coming out of high school," said Elzy.

Elzy is now the interim head coach at Kentucky after being elevated from associate coach after the surprising retirement of veteran coach Matthew Mitchell. She said in-state recruiting will be a priority for her.

"I wanted to play for coach Summitt. Now, in-state kids are huge to the success of the program," Elzy said. "We have Erin Toller, Emma King, Blair Green, all who will play impact roles for us, and it is important for us to keep homegrown Kentucky girls at home, at the state school."

What advice does she think Summitt would have for her in the heat of battle if she was still alive to help her?

"I think coach Summitt would say to remain poised, remain confident, but prepare. Prepare for those moments, those situations," Elzy said. "Not only have yourself prepared, but your team prepared, so we know what we're doing and we're confident in it. Preparation, that is what coach Summitt would tell me."

That advice was helpful when Elzy had to suspend her best player, All-American Rhyne Howard, for the first two games for "not upholding the standards of the program." Elzy said it was an easy decision because it was the right decision — and UK won both games against Murray and Belmont.

"There is an expectation and standard we hold ourselves to. If you fall short, there will be consequences. Then we



Immanuel Quickley, center, and his family on the phone with Kentucky coach John Calipari after he had been picked in the first round of the NBA draft, and then traded to the New York Knicks.

take them and move on," Elzy said.

Elzy understands that even as talented as her team is, players still have to "buy in" into the vision for the team.

"That is what we are preaching. I talk to our players, you earn your time on the practice floor, I love you all, but at the end of the day, the job is to put five players on the floor that can help us win," Elzy said.

And do the right things off the court as even Howard found out.

NCAA Finals

Kentucky coach John Calipari has no problem with the NCAA's decision to play every NCAA Tournament game in Indianapolis due to COVID-19 concerns.

"Bubbling it up is the safest way for these kids to play basketball. Having six courts in Indianapolis where they can play, and kind of like the old NAIA, if you remember, where there would be 32 teams come in, and when you lose, you're immediately out. You're on the bus and you go home. Just play it down," Calipari said.

The Kentucky coach said he was told the reason the NBA bubble worked so well was because teams did not have to travel and got in a "rhythm" of playing games.

"They wanted to play every other day. Well, you know what, we can kind of do the same thing (in the NCAA Tournament)," Calipari said.

Rupp Arena was set to host first- and second-round games, something it will not get to do now until 2025.

"This wasn't about Lexington. This wasn't about Kentucky. This was about, we're in an environment that we feel is the best way, and I agree with them. I think what they did and the stance they took, I think, was a good one," Calipari said.

With the number of college games cancelled the first week, including UK's game with Detroit Mercy, due to COVID-19 it makes what the NCAA

has planned look even smarter.

South Carolina

How will Kentucky respond to its recent offensive collapse when it hosts South Carolina Saturday? The Wildcats were outscored 55-0 in the second half by Alabama and Florida the last two weeks and gave up 488 yards while gaining only 77. In UK's last 29 drives — not counting the Vanderbilt game — that have started in its own territory, the Cats have not scored a touchdown. Not one.

No wonder Kentucky coach Mark Stoops called it "losing football" after the Florida loss when I asked him about his offense going six straight possessions the second half at Florida without a first down.

Tight end Keaton Upshaw has eight receptions for 113 yards and two scores in UK's last three games, including three catches for 28 yards and UK's only touchdown against Florida. He says finding motivation for the South Carolina game will not be a problem.

"Our last game, go out and send the seniors out the right way and prepare for a bowl game," Upshaw said.

Bowl game? He's right. Win or lose, Kentucky probably is going to be bowl bound in this COVID-19 season.

Linebacker Jamin Davis said finding motivation also will be no problem for him.

"There's no reason to bow your head, give up and throw the towel in. Nothing special about it. Just got to keep playing," Davis said.

Carrington Valentine

If you are looking for a name to remember the next couple of years on the Kentucky football team file away cornerback Carrington Valentine.

"The biggest thing that I like about him, or the best quality that he has, is his competitive nature. He is just a competitive kid and I like that," Kentucky coach Mark Stoops

said. "He is always working hard. He's dialed in. He takes things seriously.

"Sometimes freshmen are just freshmen and it doesn't sink in, or they don't take the coaching, the medicine the way they need to, but Carrington does. He does not waste a rep."

Stoops said even though Valentine has not had an abundance of game reps the work he does daily is paying off.

"It is going to pay off for him in the future. Years down the road it is going to pay off for him because of the way he attacks practice, because of his approach. He is super-competitive and I like that about him," the UK coach said.

Quotes of the Week

Quote of the Week: "They've got guys who are interchangeable who are going to meet you at the rim. They're going to make things and collapse on driving lanes and things like that so that's going to be a big strength of theirs. Obviously not too many teams in the country are going to have that length," Morehead State coach Preston Spradlin on John Calipari's team.

Quote of the Week 2: "It's a double-edged sword. When we try to throw on first down and it's incomplete, we're behind the chains and we're punting. We're just not efficient enough, not good enough and that's on us. We have to continue to work and we've gotta get that fixed," Kentucky coach Mark Stoops after UK's 34-10 loss at Florida.

Quote of the Week 3: "Really our length and athleticism. I think we have like nine guys who are 6-6 or above. It's tough to get down there and make shots in the paint. Also to be able to run the floor with our speed. We should make it really hard on teams offensively and defensively because of our size," sophomore forward Keion Brooks on what could make UK dangerous this year.



UK Radio Network analyst Mike Pratt, left, will not be on location for Kentucky road games this year due to SEC protocols. (Vicky Graff Photo)