

Improving Kaiya Sheron trusts personnel decisions that Mark Stoops makes



by Larry Vaught

Somerset coach Robbie Lucas felt that quarterback Kaiya Sheron had a better command of the offense this season than he did in 2019 when Somerset won the Class AA state championship.

"Obviously it was his team this year," said Lucas. "He got better each year here and this year he improved a great deal. I have never coached a Mr. Football but he is a viable candidate for sure."

"He is that good. He had Power 5 offers and committed to Kentucky early or he would have had more offers. His future is extremely bright."

Sheron planned to sign with Kentucky Wednesday even after the dismissal of offensive coordinator Eddie Gran and quarterbacks coach Darin Hinshaw.

"I trust coach (Mark) Stoops and he has done a good job at Kentucky. I trust who he will hire," Sheron said.

Lucas said he never had a conversation with Sheron about UK's offense this season.

"Kaiya will figure that out. A lot of times a team's record is not indicative of what you are. During this COVID year to expect the Kentucky offense to bounce back and put up big yards this year was probably unrealistic," Lucas said. "Kaiya gets all that."

Sheron amassed 9,009 total yards and 81 touchdowns— 7,080 yards and 56 touchdowns passing and 1,929 yards and 25 scores rushing — in his career and had a 31-5 record as a starting quarterback, including a state championship in 2019. Sheron completed 413 of 640 passes and threw only 16 interceptions.

Lucas was most impressed by the way Sheron improved the way he read progressions this season.

"He just understood defenses and coverages better. He checked us in and out of a lot more plays this season," Lucas said. "He lost some key receivers and linemen from last year. He had to adjust and let some other kids catch up with him. But we still scored a bunch of points thanks to him."

Sheron missed part of his eighth-grade and freshmen seasons with knee injuries.

"I worried about his future. He never did. He just worked to get stronger," Lucas said.

Sheron has what Lucas calls a "reserved personality" on and off the field.

"He never gets too high or low. I always thought he handled every pressure situation the same whether it was the last drive of the state championship game or our last game this year," Lucas said. "He's a very smart, heady kid. He's a verbal leader but leads more by his actions. Kids look up to him and follow him because they see the work and effort he puts in. That's why he improved so much."

Somerset lost to Lexington Christian — a team it beat during the season — in the second round of the playoffs but Sheron was proud of the way his team handled this season.

"It was stressful, especially at the beginning," he said. "We have a lot of seniors and a bunch of guys close to me. If we had not been able to play it was going to be really tough. Then when we did, we had a bunch of new kids that were not Somerset football ready for a while. We got better as a football team and I was just happy we got to play."

Lucas said the COVID related stress took a toll on players and coaches.

"I felt like every morning we were in a shooting gallery. Was COVID going to take away the season or practice or games. It was like waiting for the bullet to get you. But we got to play nine games and had a very good team. Kaiya was our leader and handled being in that shooting gallery all year very well. He was very resilient."

Sheron never had any second thoughts about finishing his high school academic work at Somerset this week and enrolling at UK in January to start his collegiate career even if it means giving up basketball where he averaged 9.0 points and a team-high 7.8 rebounds per game for his 26-6 team.

"No regrets (about missing basketball)," Sheron said. "Maybe later, but not now. I'm ready to report to UK and get started."

Johnny Juzang

When Kentucky plays UCLA in the CBS Sports Classic Saturday there will be a familiar face playing for the Bruins.

Sophomore Johnny Juzang transferred from UK after his freshman season — with the blessing of UK coach John Calipari. Juzang made his UCLA debut in the Bruins' 83-56 victory over San Diego last week at Pauley Pavilion after missing the first four games with a foot injury. He had 10 points — and hit a 3-pointer — and three rebounds in 19 minutes.

UCLA coach Mick Cronin likes what Juzang adds for the Bruins that might not show on the stat sheet.

"Johnny is such a weapon to score, he gives space to guys to drive to the basket," Cronin said. "You always have to be guarding him."

Juzang, who had a limited role at UK, was happy to finally get to play again, especially back in his home state.

"It felt great, man. I've been waiting to play a game in this jersey for a while now. My conditioning, my body in general, my foot as well — everything felt really good," Juzang said after the win.

UCLA has a balanced scoring offense and Cronin likes to go to his bench.

"We have multiple guys that can start. Trying to wear teams down with fresh bodies is going to be a big factor for us going forward," Cronin said. "Whoever we put in the game, we have to be able to count on them to be solid on the defensive end and make good decisions on the offensive end. It will allow us to play at a pace that wears teams down."

Terrence Clarke

Kentucky coach John Calipari had suggested he might give freshman wing Terrence Clarke a chance to play point guard if his

team's point guard play did not improve. Sporting News columnist Mike DeCourcy thought the UK coach would only do that as a "last resort" for several reasons.

"Terrence at the point is not impossible but it would be hard to do given the circumstances they are in," DeCourcy said. "I think (senior Davion) Mintz is a capable point guard. He can shoot, handle the ball and start the offense."

Yet in Kentucky's loss to Notre Dame last week, Calipari did put Clarke at point guard for most of the game. He finished with 14 points on 6-for-13 shooting with three assists, two rebounds and one steal in 38 minutes. But he also had a team-high four turnovers.

"Terrence has size and he's really aggressive in the lane. I think it opens up a lot of things, a lot of options. He can pass the ball, he has great vision. So, I think going forward, he's really good at that position," UK center Olivier Sarr said.

Despite the turnovers, Calipari said he liked Clarke at point guard so he likely will be playing that position a lot more.

"I like having his hands on the ball. I like him at point," Calipari said. "Weren't you (media members) more comfortable with him having the ball in his hands? Didn't you know that he could make plays at the rim and score and do things where they get to play him?"

What about freshman Devin Askew, the team's other point guard?

"The biggest problem with Askew is that he does not go past anybody," DeCourcy said. "But the second problem is when the ball does recycle to him and he is open, he does not shoot it. His numbers are not awful (from 3-point range) but the number of attempts taken is ridiculous."

Askew has only taken 10 3-pointers in five games but he's made four of them. He's got the best 3-point percentage on this year's UK team and DeCourcy says he has to shoot more.

"At some point Devin has to play at this level and if he's not ready, then let him wait until next year and move on to someone else," DeCourcy said.

J.D. Shelburne

Country music singer J.D. Shelburne is like a lot of Kentucky basketball fans upset with the Cats' 1-4 start.

"After the way things ended last year and not getting to finish the season, I have been like boiling steam on a hot stove waiting for this season," Shelburne said. "But so far this season has been devastating. It's heart-breaking."

"I had not heard as much about Cal's Cats during COVID so I was doing research on my own and checking out the players. I thought they would be really good. I am just praying to God now we beat Louisville."

All of Shelburne's emotions were on display during Kentucky's loss last week to Notre Dame where it almost overcame a 22-point half-time deficit. He tweeted how "disappointed" he was with the team and staff the first half. "This isn't Kentucky," he posted.

But he went all-in with the comeback and posted a tweet I was so hoping he would have to honor.

"If Kentucky wins this

I'm running to the mailbox naked!" Shelburne tweeted. When the lead was cut to 64-63 and UK had the ball, Shelburne tweeted, "I'm ready. Already in my undies."

Shelburne didn't get to make his run when Olivier Sarr's last shot missed and now he knows it will be another rough week for a Kentucky fan living in Nashville.

"People here are loving this with Kentucky basketball. They love Kentucky losing and out of the top 25," Shelburne said. "It should not be this way. We look weak. We've got work to do or I am going to go crazy."

Quotes of the Week

Quote of the Week: "Why wouldn't you zone Kentucky? The more you face a zone, the better Kentucky will get at it and eventually it won't work against them but right now I would think it would be all zone when you play Kentucky," Sport-

ingNews columnist Mike DeCourcy.

Quote of the Week 2: "Everyone on this team is a really great player. We can all score, we can all rebound. I think that is what makes us really tough and really dangerous about our team. We can all play, and every night is someone else's night," junior Blair Green on what she likes about this year's team.

Quote of the Week 3: "We always talk. We're brother and sister, so we always stay connected. He sends wonderful texts and words of encouragement. He is always here if I need him. He is part of the Wildcat family forever, so he will always be involved," UK women's coach Kyra Elzy on how often she talks to former coach Matthew Mitchell.

Robyn Benton

There was a time when calling a player a "dog" would be one of the worst

things ever. But now if a player is a "dawg" it's a badge of honor.

"To be a dawg, you know, just lay down and do the dirty work when the time is right," Kentucky All-American Rhyne Howard said. "Dre (Dre'una Edwards) is a dawg. She's going to go down there in the post, she's going to work, she's going to make the big plays."

"Robyn (Benton) is a dawg, she's going to lock down on defense, hit the 3's when we need them. Everyone's a dawg in their own way. Everyone is going to make plays, and we're looking to do the dirty work that other teams might not want to do."

Auburn transfer Robyn Benton certainly is turning into a "dawg" which is no surprise considering she earned all-SEC freshman honors at Auburn and then averaged in double figures her second season before transferring.

Britney Mason

Floral Design Team, 3rd Highest Individual Eastern Kentucky Floriculture Contest, Turf and Lawn Impromptu Speaking, Floral Design - Future Farmers of America, Horticulture State Fair 1st Place, Sources of Strength by Peers, Girls Scout Gold Award, Beta Club, Girls Varsity Basketball, Green Hand Degree, 110% Award Future Farmers of America. Britney plans to major in Landscape and Design with hopes of attending ECU.

Sierra Gonzales

Rice Station Christian Church member, 4-H Leader, Raider Team, Beta, track. Plans to attend UK, career path is nurse practitioner.

Peyton Maybrier

FCCLA vice-president, Public Relations vice-president, Beta, FBLA, National Honor Society, varsity volleyball. Aspires to play college volleyball with hopes of attending medical school and majoring in dermatology.

Madison McKinney

FFA President 2019-2020, FFA chaplain 2018-2019, KY State Fair, 2019 Region Nursery and Landscape, FFA Regional Delegate, Beta, FFA, Angel Tree program, Superior Impromptu Speaking. Plans to attend ECU and major in pre-pharmacy.

Peyton Mize

Sophomore class treasurer, Rogers Explorer, student council, Sources of Strength, Beta, Educational Talent Search, FBLA, FCCLA, ECU dual credit, Morehead dual credit -- Eagle Scholar. Plans to major in Business Management, Law or Political Science on attending business law school.

Isaac Napier

FBLA Beta, varsity baseball, golf. Plans to attend medical school.

Karlee Richardson

FBLA, Green Dot, Beta, varsity cheerleading, varsity cheer competition squad, KYasap participant. Plans to major in criminal justice with hopes of attending law school.

Katyeen Sparks

FCCLA vice president of competitive events, Green Dot advocate, FBLA, varsity volleyball, Honor Society, FCA. Plans to major in neo-natal nursing at UK.

Jenna Stone

Girls varsity soccer, captain; Beta, FBLA, Acteens Youth Girls Mission Organization, Relay for Life, chairperson, Operation Christmas Child volunteer, substitute Sunday school teacher, children's church team teacher. Plans to attend college with hopes of attending medical school.

Dean Tucker

FBLA delegate, varsity baseball, bass fishing team, Beta, Irvine First Church of the Nazarene member, student council, JV golf team (two years). Plans: ECU

Yana Turner

Beta, Estill County Public Library Teen Advisory Board, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, girls varsity soccer, teacher's aide at Emmanuel Baptist Church, volunteer at Estill County Public Library. Plans to major in midwifery with hopes of attending Morehead.

2021 Estill County Youth Salute Winners

Cobbe Click
Beta, FBLA, Varsity Golf, Varsity Basketball, Appalachian Student Voice Team at ECMS, Student Council at ECMS, Member of Restoration Community Church. Plans for four-year college. He is "very optimistic about his career plans."

Cassidy Cox
Marching Band, Pep Band, Concert Band, Student Advisory Council, Estill Elite Jumpers, Beta Club, FBLA, River City Players, Freshman Class Treasurer, Dance Blue. Plans UK in Pre-Law.

Emily Dennis
Varsity cheerleader, FCCLA, community service vice-president, active Sand Hill Christian Church member, Green Dot, Sources of Strength, Honor Roll. Plans: Morehead State in hopes of becoming a pediatric nurse.

Natalie Dixon
FBLA state competition team, varsity cheer competition team, varsity cheer sideline team, youth cheer night, Miss Tammy's Dance Studio student instructor. Plans to major in baccalaureate nursing to work in neonatal intensive care unit.

Andrew Elam
Junior Class Treasurer, Green Dot Member, FCCLA, FBLA, Beta Club, FCCLA Vice President of Membership, Varsity Golf, Varsity Baseball, First Christian Church.

Maggie Elkins
Pep Band, Concert Band, Sources of Strength peer leader, FCCLA, KMEA State Champions 2016-2017 in Class AA, KMEA State Runner-Up 2017-2018 in Class AA, volunteer at the Nassau County, Florida animal shelter, Teen Bible School leader at Ravenna Church of the Nazarene, Mission Trip 2018, in-state, with youth group; soloist at Ravenna Church of the Nazarene.

Summer Evans
2019 Rogers Scholar, Class of 2021 President, FFA vice-president, Entrepreneurial Leadership Institute, bass fishing team, Estill County School Board student representative, Bluegrass Region FFA Chapter Delegate, Estill County Junior Fair Board, Kentucky Youth Assembly, Project 7 Bible Club. Plans to major in Agriculture Business with the ambition of advocating for agriculture.

Emily Hayes
Varsity volleyball, Educational Talent Search, honors student, Beta, FCCLA. Plans: pre-dental school and later pursue her dream of being a dentist.

Deadra Johnson
FFA, FBLA, HOSA, Project 7, ECMS Dance Team Captain, 3rd-6th grades academic team, 11th grade academic team, 5th grade Beta Club, ECU TRIO educational talent search.

Rayleigh Jones
Varsity cheerleader, FBLA, student council, softball, Hospice volunteer. Plans to major in chemistry and minor in foreign languages with hopes of becoming a forensic scientist.