

Four UK commits part of marquee matchup Friday



by Larry Vaught

It's hard to imagine there could be a better marquee matchup to start a high school football season than Frederick Douglass-North Hardin this Friday in Lexington.

The game will feature four University of Kentucky commits — offensive lineman Jager Burton and receiver Dekel Crowdus of Douglas and North Hardin has running back La'Veell Wright and safety Jordan Lovett. All four are in the top eight rated players in Kentucky, including Burton at No. 1, in the 2021 recruiting class.

If that's not enough, Douglass juniors Dane Key and Ty Bryant have Kentucky offers along with a lot of other offers. Sophomore tight end Thomas Howard, a Louisville baseball commit, and sophomore receiver/defensive back Isaiah Kenney also have UK offers.

North Hardin sophomore offensive lineman Trey Alexander recently got a Kentucky offer. North Hardin seniors Marcus Harris (Kent State) and Michael Lunz (Tulane) are committed to Division I schools.

The game got set after Douglass' scheduled games with Dunbar on

Sept. 11 and Henry Clay on Sept. 18 were both cancelled. North Hardin was supposed to play Bates Creek on Sept. 11, but that game also got cancelled.

"I just got with (North Hardin) coach (Brent) Thompson and we decided to play," Douglass coach Nathan McPeck said. "There certainly will be a lot of Division I talent and I know Big Blue Nation will be happy. I am sure (UK coach Mark) Stoops and his staff will try to get here. It should be a really exciting game."

Thompson believes there's been such a long period between the last high school sports in Kentucky that Friday's game is the perfect way to put the spotlight back on high school athletics. He compares it to how college football has played premium games to open the season in recent years.

"To have a game of this magnitude for the state was a no-brainer for both of us coaches," Thompson said. "I know we both would probably rather play this game at a different time in the season but for the kids we have this game is just a bonus for us both. With us both having two UK commits, there are going to be a lot of folks looking at this game."

Douglass was Class 5A state runner-up in 2019 and North Hardin was a Class 6A semifinalist. While both teams lost players off last year's team — including Douglass offensive lineman Walker Parks, a Clemson signee, and North Hardin defensive lineman Octavius Oxendine, a UK signee



Shelby Valley freshman quarterback Ross Osborne got to work out at a summer camp with Somerset senior quarterback Kaiya Sheron, a Kentucky commit. (Sara Osborne Photo)

— both are expected to be state title contenders.

McKee is worried about Wright, who ran for 1,819 yards and 25 touchdowns in 13 games last year while averaging about seven yards per carry. He also had 34 catches for 553 yards and three more scores.

"That running back is one of the best I have seen on film," McKee said. "His athleticism and speed are unreal. You better rally to the ball and tackle if you are going to get him to the ground. With less than three weeks of practice, tackling is probably not going to be great but it's better than not playing."

Thompson agrees that the 6-0, 205-pound Wright is special.

"I would take No. 11 (Wright) for me any day of the week. I would not want to tackle him on any Friday, but I know short weeks (of practice) would be a concern," Thompson said. "I have my own concern trying to catch players he has that run great routes. They have some really fast players."

He calls Crowdus a "tremendous athlete" but is impressed by Key, too.

"I have seen him make several sensational catches," Thompson said. "Burton has also been up there for top lineman in the state for two years. Heck, they went to the state championship game and got beat 14-7 by one of the better teams (Covington Catholic) in a game that could have gone either way."

Friday's game starts at 7:30 p.m. and the audio broadcast will be available at <https://www.glicod.com/audio2> thanks to Glicod.com. Every Frederick Douglass game this season will be on Glicod.com and the weekly schedule for other games will be posted at <https://www.glicod.com/thisweek>.

"We just want to give our kids a chance to play," Thompson said. "It won't be great football. We will both make mistakes. I hope we can make it look like a game. But it's going to be fun for us and I am sure for fans, too."

How good was Bill Spivey?



Bill Spivey was an All-American at UK and former Kentucky player Guy Strong says Spivey is better than any center UK has had since then.

Just how good was former Kentucky center Bill Spivey, the first 7-footer to play at Kentucky and the national player of the year in 1951 when Kentucky won the national championship (he had 22 points, 19 rebounds in the title game)?

Spivey averaged 19.1 points per game as a freshman in the 1949-50 season and 19.5 points, 17.2 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game the next season. In his two years, he had 1,213 points — he got to the foul line 387 times in 63 games.

Spivey didn't get to play at UK again. He was injured the first half of the 1951-52 season and then sat out the second half of the season after being implicated in a point-shaving scandal. Spivey always denied the charge but UK banned him from playing. He was indicted on perjury charges after testifying before a grand jury in New York but was not convicted even though the NBA banned him from playing.

One of his teammates at Kentucky was Irvine native Guy Strong, who later became head coach at Kentucky Wesleyan, Eastern Kentucky and Oklahoma State.

"The centers that have been there (UK) since then, he would have knocked their dipstick in the mud. He was tough," Strong said.

Strong — who had to attend the same tryout to make the UK team that Spivey down — still remembers scoring 14 points as a sophomore in Madison Square Garden before spraining his ankle.

"We played St. John's there every year. Coach (Adolph) Rupp wanted to be in the Garden, which was the mecca of college basketball," Strong said. "But it was in that area where the fixers operated."

Strong eventually left Kentucky after the national title season when he seldom played and served in the Korean War before playing his final season at Eastern Kentucky. However, he remained friends with Spivey.

Spivey put together a barnstorming tour. Strong and Jock Sutherland, the former Lafayette High School coach and former Louisville basketball radio analyst, played guards on the team while two Kentucky football players played the forwards with Spivey at center.

"We traveled in one car to games and played about 15 games," Strong said.

One game was in Williamsburg and Strong assumed it would be against a local team. Instead, NBA players Jack Coleman and Arnie Risen were on the other team. Coleman played at Louisville and then played for the Rochester Royals and the St. Louis Hawks in the NBA from 1949-57. He had 6,721 points and 5,186 rebounds in his career and played in the NBA Finals three times. Risen was in the NBA for 10 years and scored 7,633 points. He won two NBA championships.

"We beat them by about 12 points I think. That's how good Spivey was," Strong said. "Risen came in and said, 'D___ Spivey, if not for that point shaving not letting you play in the NBA you would have been a shot in the arm for the whole league.' He was never indicted and never played in the NBA. If he had, everyone would still know his name."

Future Lady Cat gave early verbal commitment

Shelby Valley junior Cassidy Rowe gave her verbal commitment to Kentucky coach Matthew Mitchell before she started her high school freshman season. She has overcome two knee injuries — one the summer before her freshman season and a second one last summer — to get back on the court.

Shelby Valley has another talented player in freshman Ross Osborne, who played on the basketball team as an eighth-grader and is expected to be the starting quarterback as a freshman.

"When they were younger

they both actually played up on a fourth-grade basketball team together," said David Osborne, Ross' father. "Her dad was in my wedding. They have kind of grown up around each other."

Who would win now if they played a one-on-one game?

"He could shoot with her at times but he cannot handle the ball like she can," David Osborne said. "She is a good player, smart player. She has a good family, works her tail off. I hope she stays healthy this year and can really show what she can do."

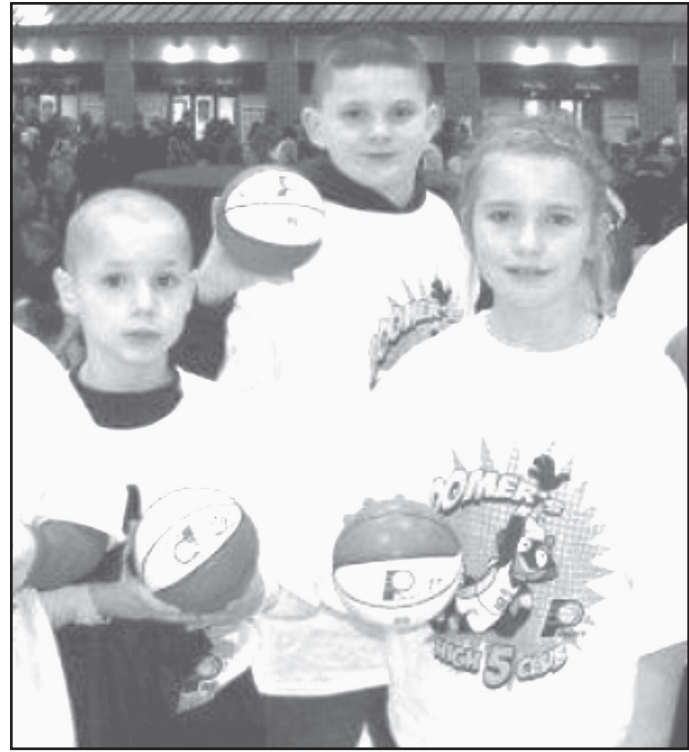
Shelby Valley girls coach Lonnie

Rowe, Cassidy's father, said Ross Osborne has "gotten stronger" and developed his basketball skills.

"But Cass said she could still outshoot him," Lonnie Rowe said.

The two Shelby Valley athletes actually played against North Laurel standout sophomore Reed Shepherd on that fourth grade team — and won the game. Shepherd is the son of Stacey (Reed) and Jeff Shepherd, both former UK standouts.

"When they were younger it was fun watching them play," Lonnie Rowe said. "You could tell both had high IQ's."



Kentucky commit Cassidy Rowe, right, and Ross Osborne, left, a talented football and basketball player, have grown up around each other and now are both standout athletes at Shelby Valley. (Lonnie Rowe Photo)

Quotes of the Week

Quote of the Week: "They had the No. 1 recruiting class in the country last year, so I'm not trying to come in here and reinvent the wheel or anything like that. But if I can come in here and help streamline stuff and go more efficient and hopefully enhance some stuff over time as I get my feet under me, I think it will go pretty good," new UK basketball recruiting coordinator Jai Lucas on his role.

Quote of the Week 2: "I'm not sure what the team thinks, but I think we can all agree on one thing — we're just ready to play. It doesn't matter what time it is. The game could be at 8 a.m. in the morning, we're still going to come out and play our best game," Kentucky running back Chris Rodriguez on UK facing Auburn at noon in its SEC opener Sept. 26.

Quote of the Week 3: "Basically he makes plays all over the field. Interceptions, pass breakup. He can hit pretty hard, too. He just has that certain 'wow' factor that makes you ask, 'Who is that guy?'" starting Kentucky safety Yusuf Corker on true freshman safety Vito Tisdale.