

Allen never quit believing in himself this season



by Larry Vaught

Dontaie Allen finished his redshirt freshman season averaging 5.4 points, 1.5 rebounds and 14 minutes per game. He

made 31 3-pointers and shot 39.7 percent from 3-point range despite having to deal with the pressure of being a UK fan favorite even in his limited playing time.

Allen had an interesting message for UK fans after he scored 23 points in Kentucky's SEC Tournament loss to Mississippi State.

"Obviously I'd say to stay with us for the following seasons. That's one thing, if you really look at the team, you can say they didn't have the best of records, you could say they weren't good.

You can have any excuse you want," Allen said. "This team fought every single game. That's something you can't say we didn't do. You can look literally, there was fight every time. I would just say to stay with us."

Stay with us certainly made it sound like transfer speculation regarding Allen is just that, especially when he talked about his offseason plans.

"I'm going to stay in the gym. The last month I've been in the gym. I'm feeling really good, really confident. I'm just going to stay in the gym literally

all summer. I'm going to work to exhaustion," Allen said.

Allen is proud that he kept doing that this season even when he was not playing and never quit believing in himself or his team.

"I think a big thing for me was it showed how resilient I was. I've always known I was resilient, but after going through things I went through this year, it just shows I'm resilient, I'm a strong person," Allen said. "I just hate that me and the team had to go out like this. I'm still kind of stuck on that."



Dontaie Allen hopes UK fans will continue to support the team going forward despite this year's 9-16 season. (SEC Photo)

Volleyball team does not mind being target for SEC opponents

Before the season even started it figured that the Southeastern Conference volleyball championship would again come down to Kentucky and Florida.

The two SEC powers play Friday and Saturday in Gainesville and as expected the matches will settle the league championship.

"We have not discussed it much (during the season) but we always know it will be a big match with Florida," junior outside hitter Alli Stumler, UK's skills leader, said. "They are one of the best teams in the conference every year and we know the SEC will come down to playing them."

"We would love to be playing at home and love to have our fans there but I think we are just grateful to be playing. Just being able to play with my teammates is awesome. It's also kind of fun playing when people are cheering against you. I like that."

Coach Craig Skinner's team has won three

straight SEC championships and swept Florida the last two years. Stumler says that past success builds confidence for UK, 16-0 this year.

"There's a fine line between cockiness and confidence. We know people are coming for us. Florida already has a couple of losses and that just adds a target on our backs," Stumler said. "But we love that pressure. That's the personality of our team. Ever since I got here, the bigger the competition we play, the better I have played. Madison (Lilley), Gabby (Curry), Avery (Skinner) all also play better when the matches mean more."

Kentucky volleyball has yet to make a Final Four or win a national title. The Cats are ranked third nationally in a season that started in October and will end in April. Stumler believes UK has a terrific chance to win the national championship this season.

"We are super balanced. Madison can set

any hitter and get a point for us," Stumler, the 2018 SEC freshman of the year, said. "In years past we have been really outside dominated. This year our middle has stepped up, the back row is more involved. When you have four attackers at all times it is hard to defend."

"Our defensive focus is really good. A lot of teams can play defense but we take great pride in that."

Stumler not only leads the team in kills, but is second in digs behind libero Gabby Curry.

"I take more pride in that because without defense you do not have offense," Stumler said. "I knew since I was little that to play at a big school you have to have ball control. I have taken pride in that since I was 13."

"All the hitters here are playing defense in drills. Everyone has to be able to control the ball. It didn't come easy at first but the more training you have, the more confidence you have. All our passers are in the gym 30 minutes be-

fore practices and games. You can never over train."

That philosophy has helped Stumler offset the graduation of All-American Leah Edmond, one of UK's all-time best players. Stumler said during her first two years at UK when the team needed a spark or big point, Edmond usually provided it.

"I was hoping to step into that and have people have the same respect for me," Stumler said. "You need someone to step up each year to gain respect and build leadership and trust. I hope I've been able to do that."

She has. Craig Skinner calls her a "rock" because of her steady play.

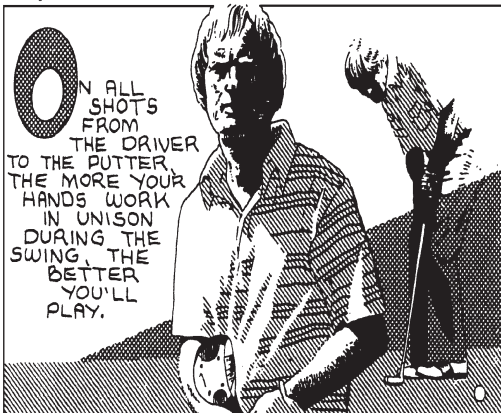
"She's hitting, blocking at a different level," the UK coach said. "She just gives people around her a certain level of confidence."

Blast from the past!

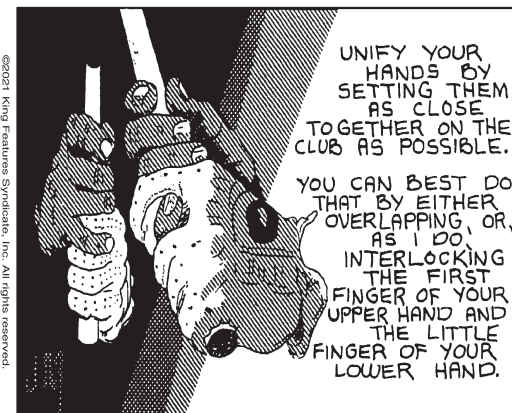


First cousins Evangiline Puckett and Wilma McIntosh in the early 1960's in front of Watson's Dollar Store and The Wash House at the bend of Broadway in Irvine. Evangiline or "Vangie" is the daughter of George Harvey Puckett and Stella McIntosh Puckett. Wilma (now Wise) is the daughter of Floyd McIntosh and Mary Profitt McIntosh.

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