

Isaiah Briscoe



Larry Vaught

Isaiah Briscoe knows exactly how he wants to be described on the basketball court.

"I would like to be known as a winner. I have always gave 110 percent between those lines and tried to win each game I played," said the Kentucky freshman point guard.

The 6-3 combo guard out of Newark, N.J., has always been a winner. He won New Jersey state championships at St. Benedict's as a freshman and sophomore and added two more after he transferred to Roselle Catholic for the next two years. He helped Team USA win a gold medal in 2014 at the under 18 FIBA Championship. He also averaged 14 points, 6 assists and 5 rebounds per game last year in the McDonald's All-American Game, Nike Hoop Summit and Jordan Brand Classic.

Briscoe never hesitates with his commitment to Kentucky even though the Cats return point guard Tyler Ulis and was not bothered when Jamal Murray, another potential point guard, signed with UK during the summer.

"Like Coach Cal said, Kentucky is not for everybody. You are going to come here, compete and work hard. Whatever happens happens. He told me that. I never asked him who was there and who else he was recruiting. I just knew that I wanted to be coached by a Hall of Fame coach and I wanted to get better," Briscoe said. "I want to be put on the biggest stage and that's why I came to Kentucky. I love to compete. When you come to Kentucky you're going to play with other McDonald's All-Americans every day in practice. That's what I want to do."

He also likes that coach John Calipari believes in "positionless" basketball and feels he can play several positions as needed.

"That is another reason I came here. Don't worry about what you are. If you are out there, give it 110 percent and things will happen," Briscoe said. "I think coach Cal will put you in the position to look the best. He protects us and he cares about us and you can't ask for more."

Briscoe is a scorer when needed, but is also a dazzling passer.

"I like to see other people score. I am a lot more unselfish than some people think. I like to see my teammates happy. If my teammates are happy, I am happy," Briscoe said. "I don't have to be the guy to go out and average the most points and do things like that. My high school team, I shared the ball and shared the love. We were all friends on the court and off the court. I just like to see everybody happy."

"I have always been a good passer. I have just played positions where I had to score more than pass. But I have always been a great passer. I guess you could say that is why my teams win."

Briscoe has always been a hard worker, often coming in to practice on his own before school started during his prep career. Calipari said that has carried over to UK with Briscoe often going in the gym, and taking others with him, for extra workouts.

"I want to get better as a player on the court and as a young man off the court. I think that they are giving me the tools to succeed at both here," Briscoe said. "I came in before school all the time to shoot. I would wake up at 5:30, get in there by 6 and school started at 7:30. I would get a good hour or more in. I had some guys go with me sometimes, but for the most part I was by myself."

"I didn't really want to just lay in bed. If you want to compete at a high level like Kentucky ... and coming here you wake up at 6 o'clock, so I am kind of used to it now because I was doing it at such a young age. It's not been that bad to keep doing that here."

He got an earlier start on doing that at Kentucky than he originally planned when he suffered a head injury trying out for the USA Men's U19 World Championship Team early in the summer and had to withdraw from the team.

"I think everything happens for a reason. Me not being able to attend USA Basketball, I came down here to Kentucky instead, lost 10 pounds and got a good feel for campus. I just think it was a blessing in disguise. I didn't think that at the time, but now I am not complaining. I am happy I was here and I am getting a college education and I would not want to be anywhere else," Briscoe said.

Not that playing with Team USA did not benefit him in a way that should help him at Kentucky.

"On the court, it taught me to play with other great players. That's another reason I wanted to come to Kentucky to play with other great players. Off the court, just handling yourself a certain way and being respectful because you never know who is watching when you are on Team USA. It's the same at Kentucky," Briscoe said.

Briscoe has been a big talker on the court, something that jumped out at UK teammates immediately.

"They are probably embellishing a little bit. I am just out there competing and trying to get the best out of Tyler and Jamal, two great players. I just like to compete. I think that if we push each other, we get each other better and that is why we are here," Briscoe said. "For the most part since I came to college I have been working on letting my game do the talking. Just remain humble and let my game talk."

Calipari says not to worry about any trash talking by Briscoe at Kentucky.

"He won't play that way here so I am not worried about. He is going to be fine. Stuff we do here, you don't have to add fuel to the fire. He has already started to change, but he has a ways to go," Calipari said.

A few weeks ago Calipari said he thought Briscoe could be the team's best defender. Now he realizes Briscoe could be even more than the coach initially thought.

"There are a few flaws in his game that he's going to have to tighten up a little bit, but he's a basketball player who happens to be physically able to be a great defensive player," Calipari said.

Calipari said he "messed with the ball" too much in high school and did more show than play.

"Talked too much. All that kind of stuff. He had to get the body right. All that stuff, but you could see that this kid can play basketball, and he'll fight to win a game. I've had teams here that I've used the term: just a will to win, man. He has a will to win. That he does," Calipari said. "And now we just have to help him with all the other stuff, but he's been good. He's been maybe even a pleasant sur-

prise. I knew he would be good; I didn't know he'd be this good."

Isaac Humphries does not have a typical Kentucky basketball resume, and it's not just because he is from Australia.

When he was young, he was more passionate about the performing arts than any sport.

"I only started playing basketball at late 12, early 13. A lot of my time was taken up in other sports, but I was more into theatre, music and singing. That was a lot of my life until I started playing basketball," said Humphries.

His sister, Claudia, loved dancing when Humphries was young and that got him into playing music and singing. His mother even moved him to a different elementary school, one known for its performing arts.

He was in plays like "The King and I" as well as "Oliver." However, he says he was far better at singing.

"Singing was just always more natural to me," Humphries said. "I never really had lesson, but I can sing a bit."

He says teammate Tyler Ulis "can rap" so he won't claim he's the best singer on the team. However, he sees music in his future.

"I think down the road is when music will come back and start up and I will juggle that and whatever else I am doing," Humphries said. "Right now I just want to focus on basketball."

He went home for a few weeks during the summer, but knows his mother and grandparents likely will be at Kentucky often during the season.

"My mom comes over a lot. I have a tight family, so my mom, my sister, grandparents come a lot just to hang

out. Now they will come over and watch me in front of a lot of people," Humphries said. "That is something we don't really have in Australia and they have not really seen me play in front of that amount of people. It will be definitely be different. I think my friends that come over will be very surprised, too."

He says he doesn't think his family has any idea about the popularity of UK basketball.

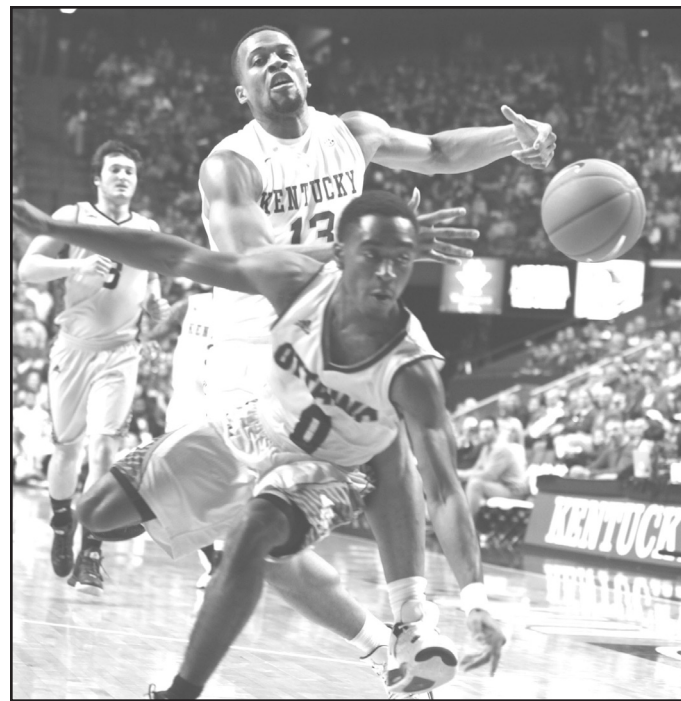
"My mom will see it when she comes to that first game and checks it all out. She will finally realize this is crazy. I don't think I even know what I am getting myself into," Humphries laughed and said. "She's going to be surprised by the level of fans and excitement that surrounds UK basketball. She has seen this facility, but not seen it in action. I think all that sort of stuff will be the most surprising thing to her about Kentucky basketball."

His mother helped influence his summer decision to join UK despite the Cats already having Skal Labissiere, Marcus Lee, Alex Poythress and Derek Willis on the roster.

"My mom told me, 'You should fly with the eagles instead of walking with the turkeys,'" I didn't want to go to a school where I would be a big fish in a little pond. It kind of scares me at times to just think how much I'll learn here. But why not come to the best place? My mom helped me understand that."

A season that started with so much promise for the Kentucky football now hinges on beating Vanderbilt and/or Louisville.

Kentucky has gone from 4-1 to 4-5 — much like it did last year when it went from 5-1 to 5-7. Many are now calling for coach Mark Stoops



Kentucky coach John Calipari believes freshman Isaiah Briscoe can be a special defender. However, Briscoe prefers just to be known as a winner.

(Vicky Graff Photo)

to bench quarterback Patrick Towles in favor of freshman Drew Barker, a change that coach Mark Stoops hinted might be coming after last Saturday's 27-3 loss at Georgia when Towles was 8-for-21 passing for 96 yards with two interceptions.

It was a career low in yardage for Towles, who has made 21 starts, and tied his fewest completions in a game. It was also the second time this season he has completed less than 40 percent of his passes — he completed just 33 percent in a loss to Florida — this year.

"I want to win football games, and if I'm not getting it done we need to play somebody else," Towles, who has six interceptions and just two touchdowns in his last four games, said.

However, former UK running back Anthony White said changing quarterbacks could be a risky move that loses the team because there is more wrong with the offense than Towles. He believes Towles has lost confidence because

of breakdowns by UK's offensive line that has put him under constant pressure.

"I am not saying Patrick is playing great, but the offense has more problems than who the quarterback is. Even if you play Drew, he's still going to be scrambling for his life just like Patrick has," White said.

If you have not read the book "One and Fun" by Aaron Torres looking back at John Calipari's first season at Kentucky, you should. It's not only a fun read, but it has a lot of tidbits of information that even the most die-hard UK fan likely didn't know because of the extensive interviews he did with players and coaches on that team.

You can get the book at Amazon.com and can contact Torres on Twitter @ Aaron_Torres. However, I an extra copy of the book to give away. Just email me at larryvau@gmail.com and tell me why reading this book would be special to you. I'll pick the one I like the best and send the book your way.

Bob Watkins' Sports In Kentucky

Drop off pass ... signals unselfishness, fans in Kentucky love it



Bob Watkins

Had me at the drop-off pass.

Against Kentucky State last week Derek Willis sprinted out on a break, manned the left flank, turned toward the basket, caught a lob for a look-at-me-show-off crowd-pleasing dunk. Instead, Willis did a drop-off pass to Alex Poythress steaming down the lane. Dunk!

Poythress, mouth agape, took the bows, but Willis delivered the play Kentucky fans love most. Hustle and unselfishness. Ideally, a definition for Team 2015-16.

Willis got himself 21 minutes — six points, nine rebounds, two blocks, two steals, a 3-pointer and five assists.

"I feel like I earned a spot on the rotation," he said after.

The 6-9 junior has steadfastly resisted a transfer from UK which I hope inspires high school ball playing wannabes. He has labored on while his coaches have recruited one-and-dones over and around him as if he's invisible. Willis' journey so far has been an education in temperance, and pay attention if not playing time.

The Bullitt County native could be latest on a long list of native sons who were

going to become "a better player at Flagship U." than any other program on the planet. Among those who "only needed a chance" Deron Feldhaus to Travis Ford to Derek Anderson and more.

Willis brings to mind Scott Padgett. An afterthought recruit from Louisville St. Xavier in mid-1990s, Padgett would be a backup option for Rick Pitino. Padgett was sent home to grow up. He went back earned a starter spot, helped UK win an NCAA title in 1998, got himself a ring, earned a degree, had a cup of coffee in the NBA. Today Scott Padgett is head coach at Samford University.

THE BIG HAND-OFF & PATIENCE

Curious how Kentucky football has created a groove — handing off its football season (pun intended) to Big Blue basketball at mid-October every year. The Wildcats current four-game losing streak began October 15, Auburn.

Three shellings later in Big Boy ball (SEC) we are reminded anew:

Talent and execution-wise in year 2015 Kentucky is no match for even SEC second-tier teams Mississippi State, Tennessee and Georgia, and a light year or two from Alabama, LSU and Florida.

This week UK's once season-of-promise is reduced to being ... underdog at Vanderbilt.

Quarterback Patrick Towles has played poorly, statistically and decision-making, but deserves credit for willingness to man up.

After the Georgia loss Towles was big boy enough to say: "If I'm not getting it done we need to play some-

body else."

No whine (publically) about dropped passes and a glaringly not-ready-for-prime time and penalty-prone offensive front.

Upside.

Laws of average and bit of optimism tell us ...

✓ Kentucky's defense will force a turnover or two on a single Saturday afternoon sometime soon.

✓ Offense will sustain a drive, move the first down sticks four-five times in a row. Don't laugh.

✓ Penalties and breaks. At crucial points in games, Mark Stoops' team has gotten too much of the former like the bad old days, and near zero of the latter.

✓ History. November is time of year (again) for Big Blue Nation to recall October 15 in Rich Brooks' third year. The 2006 Wildcats were 3-4 and boo birds were howling after a 49-0 thumping at LSU.

In the next four Saturdays Brooks became a genius. His team won four straight. After a loss in Knoxville, UK beat Clemson in the Music City Bowl, finished 8-5.

✓ Reality. Forget the boos and reject media death knell baloney and don't wait for a vote of confidence from Stoops' boss.

As it was with Brooks, this coach is going to be here. At a Dollar Store-like \$2.2 million this year, and \$2.3 next, Mark Stoops is The Man at Commonwealth through 2019.

TELEVISION OVERLOAD?

A sentence that demands an exclamation point at end instead of question mark is this one: What's a body to do when all his/her teams-of-interest are playing on

teevee at same time?

Answer: Hold tight to the remote until two-three reduce their entertainment value.

Happened here last Saturday.

Kentucky at Georgia ... Syracuse at Louisville ... Florida Atlantic at Western Kentucky ... Vanderbilt at Florida ... Iowa at Indiana ... and Penn State at Northwestern.

Kentucky and Syracuse became chopped liver early for Georgia and Louisville. Indiana was brave but only three quarters enough for unbeaten Iowa. Vandy played Florida dead even to the end. And Northwestern won on a field goal with nine seconds left.

Most entertaining game start to finish? Western Kentucky let Florida Atlantic to hang around, but Brandon Doughty's Hill-toppers smoothed their way along, 35-19.

Favorite of the day? Northwestern defeated Penn State on a 35-yard field goal with nine seconds left, 23-21.

WORTH REPEATING DEPT.

A reader sent the Lexington Herald-Leader an opinion the other day that was enough to move some of us to a hearty Amen!

Ernie Henninger of Harrodsburg hopes the ways the Kansas City Royals played to win the World Series becomes contagious.

"Who knows," he wrote, "basketball may also become watchable if more teams move from slam dunks to the crisp passing and clever play making." Amen?

And so it goes.

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