

# ESPN Insight



Larry Vaught

ESPN analyst Seth Greenberg believes John Calipari will be more patient with this team because he has an "inner peace" about him. (ESPN Photo)

Can John Calipari really be less demanding on his players this year as he says he will be because of the team's lack of experience and maturity?

From what ESPN analyst Seth Greenberg saw when he watched two Kentucky practices last month, he thinks the UK coach can do exactly that.

"He still has to be extremely demanding in effort and detail," said Greenberg. "This team will make mistakes. They are going to be making decisions on the run. We saw that in practice. But he will be more patient with this team. There is a peace about him now.

"He has always been driven and so passionate about his coaching. He has an inner peace, and I am happy he does. He just can't drive himself like he has been. He is so demanding on himself. People see how tough he is on guys but he can do that because he has their backs and the relationship he has with kids is real."

Greenberg, the former head coach at South Florida and Virginia Tech, offered a variety of other insights on Calipari's Wildcats.

— He saw no "lazy leg" from senior Alex Poythress, who missed most of last season after tearing his knee ligament and needing surgery.

"He had that bounce he had before. I think he is actually healthier than his mind is now. Once his mind gets healthy in terms of trusting that leg, he'll be fine. He showed signs of doing ridiculously explosive things," Greenberg said.

The analyst noted that UK had some "dysfunction" in Poythress' first year when UK went to the NIT. His sophomore season Calipari moved him to small forward. Last year he was destined for a "significant" role before he got hurt.

"Now he is playing his more natural position (power forward). He is such a tough matchup. He runs the court, gets to the glass, is strong enough to defend, can attack in transition and shoots well enough to keep the defense honest," Greenberg said. "I expect him to have a special season. Once he gets back to going on instinct, he can do the same freakish things he has in the past."

— Greenberg believes junior Derek Willis has a chance to be in Calipari's playing rotation.

"He has to take care of the basketball and show he can make shots," Greenberg said. "He understands where he belongs and how he can help the team be successful and if he approaches it that way he can play against the zone. He has the size and range to shoot it against the zone."

— Freshman guard Charles Matthews was the biggest surprise to Greenberg.

"I was very impressed. He is different than some other guys and brings a different

dimension. He's going to be a big part of what they do. He gives them high energy, a lock-down defender and an electric body. I think he's very valuable."

— Junior Marcus Lee still needs to understand not only how good he can be, but how good he is.

"He has to be consistent and understand that it is his time and that he is ready to be an impact player and help be a winning player. That is really important for this team," Greenberg said. "He has to fly around and do the things that he can do and not worry if he makes a mistake."

— Freshman Skal Labissiere should show improvement weekly based on how Greenberg said improve from the first practice to the second one after listening to UK's coaches.

"He has great elevation on his shot and his post scoring moves are very good," the ESPN analyst said. "He could be a terrific, outstanding defensive player off the ball and ball screens. He is not Karl-Anthony Towns. He won't be good just as a sit on the block guy. That's not who he is. He will be a good cutter and as the season goes along he will be able to score on the low block.

"He and Marcus (Lee) can play together, but that probably would not be in their best interest. Skal is so skilled offensively and can do a lot of different things. He can help extend the defense and will give you multiple guys to protect the rim.

— Sophomore guard Tyler Ulis has the underdog mentality that Greenberg likes.

"Probably the biggest surprise to me was how good Tyler Ulis was. He was the best player in the gym two days in a row," Greenberg said. "He's an elite point guard and can also really put pressure on the ball.

"I think Jamal Murray will look to Tyler, but he has to remain aggressive. Even with the ball in Tyler's hands, he has to make shots for Kentucky. I think he can be outstanding. He can really shoot the ball and Tyler will get him the ball where he needs it."

— Defending the low post early will likely be a problem for Kentucky.

"I expect Cal to extend the defense and be more aggressive," Greenberg said. "The freshmen perimeter guys are tough guys and will fight through screens and stuff. John wants to make you shoot contested shots. He's really, really good at that. He has to decide how to guard ball screens. He has agile bigs and I think they will eventually be a very good defensive team again."

Greenberg, like Calipari, expects Kentucky to see plenty of zone defenses.

"It's going to be so hard to keep Murray, Briscoe and Ulis out of the lane and Alex off the glass that teams are going to go zone," Greenberg said. "I think Cal will let them play faster and a little simpler. He'll let the guards play on instinct more. You just don't make shots against zones. You can't just settle for shots. You have to get the shots you want, get to the glass, get in the lane. They have enough big targets to do that and just like on defense, I think they'll eventually be really good against any type of defense."

\*\*\*  
Coming back from last year's knee surgery is not the first adversity that Kentucky junior Alex Poythress has had to overcome.

When he was 5 or 6 years old, he almost drowned in a

neighbor's swimming pool.

"I was at a neighbor's house swimming and the next thing I knew I woke up in the hospital," Poythress said. "I don't remember much about that. It did scare my mom, but it's fine now. No problems at all."

Guess what he did the next year after almost drowning? He took swimming lessons and learned how to swim because he thought that was the right thing to do.

"I just knew I had to learn how to swim. I swim now, so no problem," he said.

Poythress won't bring up his near drowning unless someone asks him.

I don't talk about it, but it shows my knee injury was not the end of the world," Poythress said. "It is just great to be back on the court. It was a humbling experience to have the game taken from you. It takes time to come back. You have got to do rehab, get there mentally and be confident the leg is not going to mess up and trust it again."

And how much trust does he have?

"I have a lot of trust. That is what the rehab process was for was to build trust," he said.

\*\*\*

I think Cats' Pause editor was speaking for all Kentucky fans with this tweet he had on Twitter late in last week's 52-21 loss to Tennessee: "Kentucky needs to turn its clocks so far back tonight that this game never happened. Call it Season Savings Time."

Kentucky's season seemed so promising after wins over South Carolina and Missouri around a close loss to Florida. But the last two weeks coach Mark Stoops' team has been awful in all phases in losses to Mississippi State and Tennessee.

I think Stoops was the most upset I have seen him in three years at Kentucky after the loss not only with the execution but also the effort — or lack of effort.

Quarterback Patrick Towles — remember he predicted before the season that UK could play for the SEC title this year — didn't mince words about the loss to the Vols.

"We are all upset. Nobody is happy. Getting your ass kicked sucks. There is no way around it. We are a bunch of men and we have to get better," Towles said.

Georgia has not lived up to its preseason hype and has struggled offensively.

Yet the Bulldogs opened as a 16-point favorite this week and another blowout loss would be a huge setback.

Yet recruiting may not suffer the way some worry. Florida junior quarterback Mac Jones indicated on Twitter over the weekend he "was 100% committed to Kentucky" and how he believed in the future. Woodford County four-star offensive lineman Drake Jackson also went on Twitter with this tweet: "#BBN keep the faith. The #B16BlueNation isn't going anywhere. It's going to take time, but we're willing to put the work in. #StoopsTroops." Ohio senior defensive tackle Kordell Lowney tweeted, "Somebody just asked me was I still all in with UK and I told them #BBN for life."

Kentucky lost six straight games to end last year after starting 5-1 to miss a bowl bid. Now UK has gone from 4-1 to 4-4. Quarterback Patrick Towles insists there won't be a collapse to match last year's finish.

"We are a tight-knit family, we can't point fingers," Towles said. "It's not one person's fault, it's not everyone's fault. We'll go down to Georgia and give them all we've got."

One just wonders if that will be enough.

\*\*\*

I enjoyed hearing from Joseph Fats, who reads this column in the Bourbon County Citizen.

"After reading your first few articles, I really enjoy your writing style and approach. With your recent article 'Teammates love Skal,' you share the human side of these young and gifted athletes. Too often we 'UK basketball fanatics' fail to appreciate that these are young 17, 18, 19 year old kids. Few of us could handle the pressure and spotlight that these young men will be subjected to," Fast said.

"I hope your future articles will also show us more of their human sides and acquaint us with the personalities behind those great jump shots, and include all of the players and not just the projected superstars. Also, I would love to read more stories about some of the incredible things that the UK athletes (all UK varsity athletes, male and female) do off the fields and courts."

If you have a comment, suggestion or criticism, let me know at [larryvau@gmail.com](mailto:larryvau@gmail.com) or on Twitter at [@vaughtsviews](https://twitter.com/vaughtsviews).

## Bob Watkins' Sports In Kentucky

### Things put into the light of day is a sportswriter's obligation



Bob Watkins

*When you're a sportswriter, you learn how to use your imagination ... because it's the same game played over and over again. There's nothing unique or marvelous. It's not an earthquake, or a weird mass murder. It's same old game played over and over, and you have to bring out the personalities. You have to drag them kicking and screaming out into the light of day, or you're not a good sportswriter.*

— Rick Bragg, author extraordinaire

This week, a few let's get a-few-things-straight items.

Too frequently lately I am asked (in colorful ways) why I hate John Calipari? While the word (hate) is alien to me, the word disappoint is not.

For the record, recruitment of bright young men who play basketball with extraordinary skill together and win games, is a joyous combination. That Kentuckians enjoy it is important to me. That bright young men are encouraged (by an adult) to consider life beyond dollars, is another good idea.

And so, as Rick Bragg

said eloquently, it's important also that a sportswriter endeavor to "bring out the personalities ... drag them kicking and screaming out into the light of day."

And so, John Calipari's record (and my disapproval), in light of day.

✓ Braggadocio. University of Kentucky ought live up to its Flagship status, not feed images of arrogance.

✓ Kentucky's history of NCAA violations past, makes shameful that (my alma mater) hired him at all.

✓ Shadowy methods used to climb up college basketball. His times at UMass and Memphis are hardly distinguished and are on file at the NCAA, despite being ignored by fans. His coaching wins at both schools and their Final Four banners are removed.

✓ Academics, the college experience, progress toward an education-come-to-importance after the ball stops bouncing (late 20s), are secondary to this coach, making UK a university of basketball.

✓ Twisted. Winningest program in Dr. James Naismith's game is a semi-professional franchise in Lexington that exploits young men. Even those swept up to the NBA will be looking for "some kind of work beyond counting my money," one day. Promising instant lollipop while enriching himself.

✓ A coach giving scholarships to couple UK students is commendable, but to publicize it is self-serving. Particularly since the scholarship money comes not from his pocket, but from funds gotten from a pay-to-attend clinic.

✓ Humanitarian indeed, Calipari visiting a young fan in hospital, but curious how a camera seems al-

ways at hand to record it.

And so, no hate here for John Calipari. Putting his resumé out in light of day alongside opinion is an obligation to readers, what a sportswriter ought to do.

#### STOOPS & RICHT

Mark Stoops is dedicated enough, Mark Richt at Georgia is too.

In common their teams are coming off old fashion a beans-and-corn bread style whuppin' last Saturday.

A writer in Georgia said, "If there's a have-it-all program in college football that never seems to amount to the greatness it should. Great recruits: Check. Great fan base: Check. Great facilities: Check."

Same could apply at Kentucky.

Stoops and Richt contrasts this week?

• The radio call-in crowd at Georgia want Richt fired yesterday!

• Callers in Kentucky want to know what time the basketball game starts.

On Saturday at noon, Kentucky (4-4) plays at Georgia (5-3).

#### HAPPY CAMPUS

Since college football season is entertainment, except in the south where it's Gettysburg, Antietam and Bull Run combined, I wondered as we hit the get-bowl-eligible stretch, on what campus is football being enjoyed most?

Guess here: Iowa (8-0), Memphis (8-0), Ohio State (8-0), Notre Dame (7-1), and Temple (7-1). Receiving votes: Oklahoma State and Houston are 8-0, and Toledo 7-0.

Most entertaining locally, no contest: Western Kentucky. The 7-2 Hilltoppers celebrate homecoming this week against Florida Atlantic (2-6).

#### WORTH REPEATING DEPT.

Proving he is the low-life scallywag some of us thought when he played at Michigan, ESPN contributor Jalen Rose weighed in on University of Louisville's sex scandal via podcast the other day. "What you see at a bachelor or bachelorette party is what happens on a recruiting visit."

"And, as a 17-year-old kid, first off, if I'm not getting laid, I'm not coming. I'm not signing. I'm not coming."

And this ...

At its basketball introductory scrimmage, University of Michigan included a nod to the 1990s Fab Five featuring Chris Webber and Rose. Wolverine fans took to Facebook to protest.

• "Webber and Rose were nothing but thugs," said one.

• "These five are a disgrace to Michigan basketball and caused a decade of no tournament play. Every win is questionable. Anyone who throws a game for money should get no second chance."

#### JOHN PELPHREY

One of the most popular Kentucky players ever, John Pelphrey did color analysis for the blue-white scrimmage last week and did it well. Reflecting his time-and-place travels since those heady days back home (Mr. Basketball 1987) and Unforgettable days in Lexington, Pelphrey-speak these days is notably polished and mid-America moving one eastern Kentucky fan to say, "Pel sure don't talk like no mountain boy from Paintsville no more, does he?"

And so it goes.

<[bob.Watkins24@aol.com](mailto:bob.Watkins24@aol.com).

**Attention Veterans**

A Veterans Benefits Field Representative will be at the National Guard Armory, 335 Cow Creek Road, Ravenna, on Thursday, November 5th and normally the first Thursday of each month. The hours are 1:30 p.m. until 3:30 p.m.

Veterans and their dependants will receive assistance filing for Federal and state veterans benefits. This service is provided free of charge by the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs. To apply, veterans need to furnish copies of pertinent documentation to verify eligibility. For further information, please call toll free within Kentucky, 1-866-376-0308, to speak with a Veterans Benefits Field Representative.

**The Garden Bug**

Too many new young stems ("suckers") growing from the roots of your lilac bush can compromise the vigor of the main plant. Remove them in the fall by digging down to the root and tearing them away from the roots, getting as much of each stem as possible. If they sprout up again, prune both the root and the young stem; they can grow a new tree. Plant elsewhere or give it to a friend.

**Pruning lilacs**

— Brenda Weaver

Source: [www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com), [growinggreener.blogspot.com](http://growinggreener.blogspot.com)