

# Isaac Humphries



Larry Vaught

When John Calipari flew to Indiana to watch Isaac Humphries play last season, he said it was during the "worst snow storm" he encountered last year.

"I almost didn't even go," said Calipari.

Once he landed, he called former Notre Dame coach Digger Phelps and current Irish coach Mike Brey who told him it never snowed like that.

"That's when I was fighting to get to the gym," Calipari said. "But I watched him play and said that is a 7-footer who has skills and is bigger than (former Cat) Josh Harrellson. I knew he was a young kid. I just wanted to take a glance at him. Then when he said he was reclassifying (to the 2015 recruiting class), I said he would be good for us."

The Australian center helped his country win a silver medal at the 2014 FIBA Under 17 World Championship. He averaged 18.9 points, 11.6 rebounds and 3.3 blocks per game in seven games. Humphries scored 41 points and grabbed 19 rebounds against Canada and Jamal Murray, another summer UK addition.

Humphries let few know that he was interested in coming to Kentucky before he made a summer decision to sign with the Wildcats and it became official on Aug. 20.

"My circle is very, very close. We are not the type that tells everyone everything. I wanted to keep it quiet until everything was final. Having such a small circle did help and everyone understood what I wanted," Humphries said. "I planned to reclassify in March. It had been in the works but I had just been trying to get good grades and figure out all that stuff."

"It wasn't always going to be Kentucky. There were other schools. I don't think any player that is recruited says this is it months in advance. It was just a process of getting to know every school and getting to know the coach and just deciding like any normal player would. Then it was obvious it was Kentucky."

He gave Kentucky needed depth on the inside to go with Skal Labissiere, Marcus Lee and Alex Poythress.

"I work a lot around the basket. I like to bang inside, go really hard with post moves," Humphries said. "Now I am starting to shoot outside and put the ball on the floor a lot. I think that an all-around 7-footer is an asset to everyone and that is my mentality."

"My 3-point range is getting there I think. My mid-range is a lot better. To me, it is very reliable. I feel like if I shoot it is going in unless it is an off night. The 3-point range has not come yet. I am slowly developing that one step at a time."

Junior guard Dominique Hawkins likes the way Humphries plays.

"He is really fundamentally sound. He is very strong. People are saying he is just like Josh Harrellson and I can agree with that. His corner and mid-range shots go in all the time," Hawkins said.

Jamal Murray, another summer signee, has played with Humphries and told Calipari how good he was.

"The kid is really skilled. He makes 15-footers, makes free throws. Anything around the goal he makes," the UK coach said. "When he shoots it, you just think it is going in."

Humphries says going against Labissiere and Lee daily have made him quickly improve.

"They are both different players and both such good players. It's very good for me to go against them and learn how to play against that style of play," he said. "I think I will have to adjust a little bit to the speed but one of my reasons for coming to high school (at La Lumiere School in Indiana) was to somewhat get adjusted to that American style of play. Now that I have done that, I think I will be one step closer to adjusting to the college level."

He likes the talent on the team and the friendship off the court.

"I think they are all really great people off the court and on the court they are obviously really good players. They are just great guys and I am looking forward to becoming brothers with them," Humphries said.

Tai Wynyard of New Zealand plans to join the team in December. Will that give Humphries a mater he can relate with?

"We have conversed a few times at tournaments and games. I know him well enough if saw him I would say hi," Humphries said. "But I don't really know many New Zealanders, so I imagine they are probably really different. The culture there is different. To us, it is very different."

He said teammates ask him few questions about Australia, but fans and other students do often.

"I have never been around an Australian," Hawkins said. "This is my first one. He is a really nice guy. Has a great personality but is very shy. I remember when I was a freshman I was shy. Hopefully we can get him out of that."

Humphries is used to being on his own. He left home at age 15 to move to another state to attend the Australian Institute of Sport where he trained and lived for a year.

"Then after that year I moved to America for a year and now I am here. I have been away for a while and I am used to it," the Kentucky freshman said. "I was only 16 when I got to Indiana, but it honestly wasn't that hard. I was accustomed to not seeing family all the time. There was a level of getting used to it, but I had great people around me. It was not that bad and it is nothing but great here."

Calipari loves that attitude and the way Humphries has accepted his role on the team.

"Isaac knows he's a good player, but I'm not as good as those three (Lee, Labissiere and Derek Willis ahead of him). It's a hard position to be in. He's just ... you're really good, too, but you're not as good as those guys, so you're going to have to wait your turn. He was fine," Calipari said.

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Former Kentucky All-American Mike Pratt is not yet convinced that everyone understands "how significant" it was when the Wildcats started last year 38-0 before losing to Wisconsin in the Final Four.

"With the one-and-done mentality and so many players leaving (school) early, going 38-0 is pretty significant," said Pratt. "That is hard even with the softening of the depth in college basketball. To organize your team and get them to understand focus like Cal (John Calipari) did is pretty impressive."

While players and coaches insisted the pressure of an unbeaten season did not create pressure on the team, Pratt

has a slightly different view.

"Last year I saw that tent UK basketball is under grow. It was a huge tent. At the end of the year, everybody was in that tent. Anybody who wrote about college basketball, or wrote period, was trying to get something from this team or staff. There were a lot of people hoping they would lose," Pratt said.

"I watched this team keep its composure. They did not get rattled. They had TV people go to class with them. They hounded these young guys. But until the NCAA Tournament, I never saw it bother them. They walked right through it."

"Starting with the NCAA, I just saw a change in their body language. They were a little more frustrated with the same questions from the media. It took a lot out of them being unbeaten. They just got worn out under that big tent. It's so hard to go 38-0. We may never see that again. Last year just wore those guys out. It made them better men and I give them a lot of credit for handling everything they did as well as they did."

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Finally, let's look at Kentucky football as it gets set to host Charlotte Saturday in hopes of ending a five-game losing streak. If the Cats don't win this game, maybe coach Mark Stoops should just call it quits and leave. But with the way this season has gone, who knows.

Even though UK is 4-6 and can still get bowl eligible by beating Charlotte and Lou-

isville, the buzz is that there might not be enough fans at Commonwealth Stadium Saturday to fill Rupp Arena. I doubt UK fans will bail that much — after all, they have endured years of misery. But the loss at Vanderbilt last week certainly soured the fan base and should have.

What would quarterback Patrick Towles say to fans?

"We got two chances to go to make the postgame. Charlotte next week and then Louisville comes to town. I can tell you this every person in that locker room is going to give everything they possibly have these last two games," Towles said after the 21-17 loss at Vanderbilt. "If we come up short we come up short, but like I said I can never fault our effort. We gave it everything we had, and we were fighting to the last minute and I totally expect that from my guys every Saturday."

Towles was benched for part of the game in favor of Drew Barker, who followed his first scoring pass with an interception that was returned for a score.

"I have 100-percent confidence in this team and that we can bounce back," Barker said. "We are really talented, we just haven't put it all together yet in a full game. We have spurts where we look really good but we haven't put it together in a full game. I have 100-percent faith in this team."

"We still need two more wins to get to a bowl game and we got two more games



Isaac Humphries, left, has accepted his role playing behind talented teammates at Kentucky but also knows that will only make him better.

(Vicky Graff Photo)

left, so if you can't get fired up for two games and we have to win both, then I don't know if you should really be on this team. It was a tough loss, we are mad about it, but we just got to keep moving forward and go and get these next two wins."

Sounds good, but count me as one not convinced that UK can overcome not only player mistakes on the field,

but also continuing miscues by a coaching staff that is being paid way too much to make the decisions it has during games. \*\*\*

If you have a comment, suggestion or criticism, let me know at larryvau@gmail.com or on Twitter at @vaughtsviews. I've enjoyed hearing from a lot of you the last few weeks.

## Bob Watkins' Sports In Kentucky Night Kentucky saved Duke Basketball ... was a Saturday



Bob Watkins

Kentucky and Duke.

Tuesday's renewal of college hoops ultimate rivalry, what was at stake? Maybe these things.

√ Brag rights. Important mostly to Kentucky fans since Dookie save their vitriol for powder blue Tar Heel.

√ Rankings. By Wednesday morning, Pike County to Providence, experts will have analyzed, replayed and decided who is Number One and why who is 1A in the only polls that count, theirs.

√ All new people. Kentucky will play as many as five rookies; Duke will use five newcomers.

√ Sideshow. Analyst will swoon over Skal Labissiere and Brandon Ingram.

√ Game film to file.

√ Coaching.

√ Momentum? Kentucky will return home to toast four marshmallows before a game at UCLA December 3. Duke plays VCU then Wisconsin or Georgetown in Madison Square Garden.

√ Reflections on the Kentucky-Duke rivalry for BBN ...

• NCAA title game 1978. Kentucky 94, Duke 88. MVP Jack Givens scored 42.

• NCAA Regional 1992. Kentucky 102, Duke 104. For the purist, a classic in style, skill, and drama all the way to "why on earth didn't Pitino defend the in-bounds pass!?"

And, a personal favorite.

• NCAA Final Four 1966. Kentucky 83, Duke

79. Was the night in College Park, Maryland when Rupp's Runts saved Duke basketball.

Saved the Dookies? The No. 2 ranked Blue Devils (all white skinned) were eliminated at the Final Four by No. 1 Kentucky on a Friday. On a Saturday Texas Western (not all black skinned, despite the the myth) shocked college basketball beating (all white skinned) Kentucky.

Eureka Moment. The national media herd found its voice for social justice and need for a villain. After 29 games played over three months, it was discovered Adolph Rupp's players were all white skinned. Never mind that Vic Bubas's Duke roster was same.

And so, Duke went home to segregated North Carolina to plan for 1966-67. Rupp's Runts? Fans fell into despair too soon. Suddenly America's Team barely a fortnight earlier, with National Coach of the Year Adolph Rupp on Sports Illustrated cover, was now lily white and Rupp was a racist.

Duke had avoided a hateful image-makeover. Whew.

March 19, 1966, Kentucky saved Duke basketball from scorn and condemnation that would span decades and a new generation of media doing preachments. Most wrote and discussed it in context of "Well, I read about it somewhere."

So, March 19, 1966. The night Kentucky saved Duke basketball.

### FACES IN THE CROWD

Thanksgiving draws near. Facial expressions among the familiars makes an interesting People Watch

• Bobby Petrino. Cautious smile. Still contrite in public and less the braggart he once was, Petrino has orchestrated a four game win streak, assured an invitation to post season. Two games to go, Louisville Cardinals

are about increasing their bowl game cha-ching.

• Louisville fans. Happy but subdued. Boys and girls wearing red and black would be chortling louder, but for a road game still ahead in Lexington. Reason Two: UofL is still under clouds of sexual scandal and sombrero damage control.

• Mark Stoops. Gritted teeth and seething. Expressions familiar to UK fans older than 70 who witnessed Blanton Collier, Charlie Bradshaw, John Ray and Jerry Claiborne go into that good night ... with gritted teeth and seething.

• Kentucky football fans. Shock and awe and dispirited ... again. When Charlotte visits Saturday, fans be wary of UK Athletics provided estimated attendance number.

Elsewhere ...

• Rick Pitino. Anybody recall the expression "season without joy"??

• Derek Willis. Told-jaso.

• Jeff Brohm. Season ball coaches dream about ... often followed by pay hike to stay or job jump at the end. Psst, nobody I know has whispered Brohm's name in sentence: "... but he's done this with Petrino recruits."

• Brandon Doughty. Genuine student-athlete Heisman Trophy candidate.

### THE DOUGHTY FACTOR

Six college football seasons in, here standeth a Role Model and poster guy for college athletics. Brandon Doughty, a 3-star rated player in Davie, Florida, is about to finish his sixth year at Western Kentucky University.

Doughty's numbers are incredible. More than 12,000 yards passing completed seven of every 10 attempts, 49 touchdown throws in 2014, with 34-and-counting this season.

Doughty likely won't be invited to New York for the Heisman Trophy show, but the 6-3, 220-pounds will play on Sunday next year.

Statistically and for leadership, Doughty is The Deal. Here's how: Doughty is one of 10 finalists for the 2015 Senior CLASS Award. CLASS: Celebrating Loyalty and Achievement for Staying in School. Total student-athlete and role model, Brandon Doughty.

### PHILIP HAYWOOD

In support of the idea good things come in bunches ...

Philip Haywood at Belfry High has become one of 15 high school football coaches nationally to reach 400 wins.

And, the coach has written a book. Faith, Family and Football (235 pages, \$24.95). Google it on the internet.

High praise for Haywood come from retired sports writer Mike Fields and former University of Kentucky star Jeff Van Note.

"Philip Haywood is not just a football coach; he's a life coach," sayeth Fields.

Van Note: "Xs and Os, the wins and losses are covered. Yet it is the spirit of teaching, preparing, influencing, pushing, loving, caring, and driving young men to be the best that they can be at what they are doing in this time of their life. He gets it."

A Life Coach. Yes. I have long admired Haywood's grip on humility and principled wide-angle approaches to his work. Perhaps most perfectly illustrated in excerpts from an interview with a WKYT-TV reporter.

• "I've never made a tackle, never made a block, never scored a touchdown."

• "I'm just the guy who kind of encourages them and gets on the sidelines (and) cheers them on."

"I'm just the guy who gets to come down and do an interview with you and be the front guy for the team."

At high school level, a Life Coach. Yes.

And so it goes.

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