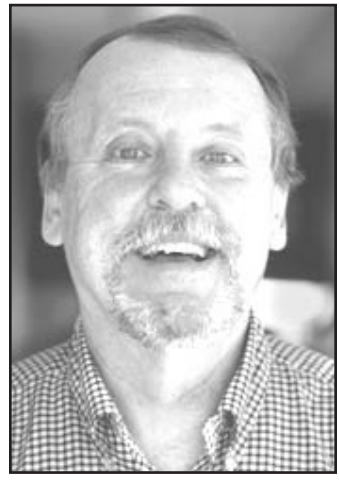


# All-American Sacha Killeya-Jones Signs With UK



Larry Vaught

There was a time that Kentucky signee Sacha Killeya-Jones had more passion for football than basketball and never dreamed of playing in the McDonald's All-American Game like he did this week in Chicago.

His mother, Ley, a former college basketball player, put a basketball in his hand when he was only 1.

"We bought him a little kiddie hoop for inside like most parents," she said. "It was the first sport we let him play."

By age 5, he started playing at the YMCA in New Jersey more to hang out with friends than because he loved basketball. He also played T-ball, soccer and lacrosse.

"We let him do what he wanted," Ley said.

When friends asked him if he wanted to play football, she was not excited but figured once the players put on helmets and had contact that he "would run the opposite direction" and be done with football.

"For the first two weeks, there was no hitting. The first day they started hitting, he trots over to us and I am thinking he's ready to go," she said. "Instead, he told me how much he loved it and wanted to play football. He was serious. He went to a Pop Warner team and

played quarterback."

He was good enough to play in an All-American middle school game in Phoenix even though he was still playing local basketball in North Carolina where his family had moved.

He left North Carolina to play basketball and JV football as a freshman at Woodberry Forest, a Virginia boarding school known for football. His mother said something "clicked" with the basketball coach and he decided immediately he would try out for the varsity team as a sophomore. Still, his mother said during the summer before his sophomore year he went to quarterback camps at Duke and Wake Forest.

"But he had fallen in love with basketball and then he also grew five inches after his freshman year. We wanted Sacha to make the decision (about playing football) himself. We were probably going to pull him out of football if he played another year. If you think he is slender now, he was 30 pounds or more lighter then," she said.

Once he switched his focus to basketball, he enrolled at Virginia Episcopal as a junior to play for former Virginia star Curtis Staples.

Yet even his parents did not expect him to blossom into a 6-10 star player that saw his stock soar during the summer before his senior year.

"He has always been a very, very good practice player," his father, Reggie, said. "He loves practices as much as playing games. We never had to force him to go to practice. He was always anxious to go. If he was not at practice, he was more upset that he couldn't go because he wanted to get better. He has had the right people around him to get better."



Sacha Killeya-Jones was all smiles after signing with Kentucky as were his parents and younger brother. His father, Reggie said they "never knew he would be this good." He played in the McDonald's All-American Game this week. (Phenomhoopreport.com Photo)

"We never knew he would be this good. We were always doubting he would make this team or that team and was not good enough by looking at other players. We knew he was good on teams he played on, but we never thought he was a superstar. We had our doubts even though most people around us were telling us how good he was. We never took it seriously."

His mother said they never truly understood how good their son might be if he devoted himself to basketball.

"We finally got him in some high level camps and that's when people started telling us he could be special," Ley said. "We didn't want to be the parents that said, 'My kid is going to play in the NBA.' We wanted him to find his own path."

He found that path. He developed into a McDonald's All-American and one of the nation's top power forwards. He played in the McDonald's All-American Game this week along with future UK teammates Malik Monk, De'Aaron Fox and Bam Adebayo as well as remaining UK target Marques Bolden.

"I've seen him develop at a fast pace," Virginia Episcopal coach Curtis Staples said. "He understands his flaws and wants to work on them. A lot of kids don't work on the things they need to improve when they're in high school. He did and he will keep doing that at Kentucky and have a great career."

## Epps Gets 9th Best

It was a bit ironic that Washington was the team that ended Kentucky's season by beating the UK women in Rupp Arena in the NCAA Tournament regional semifinals last week.

Washington coach Mike Neighbors not only dates UK fan Amy Ratliff of Lexington, but he knew plenty about UK junior guard Makayla Epps and how good she is.

"Any time a kid's capable of putting a triple-double on you, she better get your attention. She can dominate the game without having to score. She can dominate the game without having to get shots. She's a very, very impressive leader. You can tell that she's the one that gets them rallied together," Neighbors said before playing UK.

"Obviously growing up watching her dad (Anthony Epps) play (for Kentucky) ... I'm from Arkansas, so I remember the days of him playing. Then when we recruited her (at Xavier when he was an assistant coach), you could tell who she was immediately, her style of play is like his. She presents a lot of problems because she's so aggressive. She can hit you scoring, she can hit you rebounds, she can hit you with assists, she makes a really hard weapon."

Epps had a season-high 30 points, becoming just the fifth UK woman to score 30 or more points in an NCAA Tournament game, against Washington. She also had five rebounds and four assists. She finished the year



Kentucky junior Makayla Epps had 30 points in the NCAA Tournament loss to Washington and finished the season with 546 points, the ninth best single season total in UK history. (Vicky Graff Photo)

with 546 points, the ninth best total in UK history.

## Nice To See Wiltjer

It was nice to see former Kentucky player Kyle Wiltjer help Gonzaga pull off two upsets in NCAA Tournament play and almost get the Zags into the Elite Eight. Wiltjer, who played two years at UK and was on the 2012 national title team, had a banner year for Gonzaga.

It was also nice to see all the support he got from Kentucky fans during the tournament considering that many were not always that kind to him at UK, especially during his sophomore season.

"I know I've said it before but thank you BBN for your continued support, especially during the tourney!" Wiltjer posted on Twitter.

Many former teammates were among those constantly praising and congratulating Wiltjer all season.

## Football In 3rd Week

Kentucky's spring football practice is now in its third week and here are a couple of names to watch.

First, linebacker Courtney Love, a transfer from Nebraska who sat out last season and is now being counted on to be a playmaker and team leader.

"He's real important, because as you've heard us talk about, he's special when it comes to a person and leadership. He's special. He's way above the norm. And he's a great kid," Kentucky coach Mark Stoops said. "I think that's important to have in your locker room."

"But he's got to play that way on the field, and he's done very well, he's been really solid. As you know, he was ineligible last year, so he really wasn't with us. So he's got to learn the defense still."

Freshman linebacker Kash Daniel quickly bonded with Love after he got to UK in January.

"Courtney Love has been like a big brother and every time I text him I call him that. He is a natural leader," Daniel said. "He took me under his wing and got me through practice and everything off the field."

"So whenever I have a question, I know I can always go to Courtney and he can always help me if I was ever in trouble and he knows he can come to me and I would do the same thing for him."

Next, receivers coach Lamar Thomas. Former UK quarterback Freddie Maggard calls him the "biggest diva" in the meeting room with receivers now and says that is a good thing because all receivers feel they are divas.

"I like coach Thomas' coaching style. Honestly, that is kind of what I come from and am used to," said redshirt freshman receiver Jabari Greenwood. "He's more of a hands on coach that will get on you and everything but also has a good relationship with you. I like his style. He pushes us."

"I definitely like the swagger part he has, too. That is what wide receiver is all about. It's the position that has the most swag, the most juice. I definitely like that side of him."

So does Stoops, who lured him away from the Louisville staff.

"We need that. We need that across the board, coaches to push these guys and get them energized. He's been a good influence on them," Stoops said.

Thomas' influence may also be showing in recruiting as 6-4 receiver JaVonte

Richardson of Ohio verbally committed to UK last week. He picked the Cats over Michigan, Michigan State and Ohio State.

He was in Lexington last weekend and announced on Twitter that he had committed. He's ranked as the No. 2 overall player in Ohio and top 250 player in the nation.

## A Bit of a Buzz

Freshman linebacker Kash Daniel of Paintsville enjoyed his first spring break at Kentucky with a trip to the beach.

"It was definitely tough sitting on the beach chilling, not having anything to worry about," Daniel said.

However, a picture he posted on social media with two female friends standing in the ocean with him caused a bit of a buzz.

"They are both my friends. I have known them since I got here (to UK)," Daniel smiled and said. "They were like, 'Hey Kash, post this on Instagram so we can get some followers.' So I was just trying to help them out. Everybody kind of blew that up but there was nothing wrong with it. Still, a lot of people are not over it yet."

## Contact Larry

Remember you can contact me at larryvau@gmail.com or @vaughtsviews. I would love to know your favorite Tyler Ullis memory.

**Wanderings from the Woods & Water**  
by Jay Bicknell  
CorridorHR@gmail.com



## Two 410's

This coming Saturday morning is a big day for the Bicknell boys. We have been planning for this day for a year. Josh has redemption on his mind. On Jake's mind is another set of hooks for his collection. The boys are to make some 410 shotguns bark.

Youth turkey season is only a few days away. I am not sure who is more excited, me or the boys. We have been counting down the days. When I get home from work the boys ask me, guess what this weekend is dad? I am pretty sure if I didn't take them turkey hunting Saturday morning something might happen to me in my sleep.

Jake killed a Jake last youth season. He says he wants to shoot a big gobbler this season. He also says he will shoot the first legal turkey. So whatever walks by might be getting a headache!

Josh has redemption on the mind. Last season he shot a gobbler but it flopped a few times then flew off. Or as Josh says, his turkey flew the coop. He is ready to put the smack down on a turkey. He is a pretty good shot with his new 410 so if one gets close it will be in trouble.

This year Josh shoots first. Jake and him decided this. Jake shot and killed first last season so Jake said Josh is up to bat first this season. We will

see how big brother handles it if a longbeard walks up first!

Our decoys are packed. The blind is ready. The turkey vest is packed for action. The boys' 410's are hungry for turkeys. We are ready for our favorite turkey day! Bring on youth turkey season and hopefully a couple of turkeys.

I wish good luck to all youth hunters this coming weekend. If you get a turkey, please send a picture. Be safe and be careful this season. Be sure to shoot them where the food goes in.

Reminder, the Wounded Warrior hunt is just around the corner. If you have interest in helping give me a call at 859-619-3420 or email me at <corridorhr@gmail.com>. This year we will have 10 Wounded Warriors hunting with us.

Until next week, get out and enjoy God's creation!

**Birding BITS** BY Cindy Brook

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