

Ulis And Murray Likely Played Their Last Game



Larry Vaught

Jamal Murray

Nothing Kentucky freshman Jamal Murray did this season surprised Larry Blunt, his coach at Orangeville Prep in Canada.

"A lot of Canadian kids are typically under recruited. Jamal, to his credit, with his training and things he did with his father and at the (Athlete) Institute (Basketball Academy), he has just continued to excel and grow. He's 6-5, getting stronger. The crazy part is that the year before he put up even better numbers and I still don't think the world has really seen what he can do yet," said Blunt.

If that is true, Murray has extraordinary talent because he had a brilliant freshman season and became one of the nation's best scorers. He averaged 20 points per game, shot 40 percent from 3-point range and made at least one 3-pointer in every game. He also averaged 5.2 rebounds per game.

So how can he do more? "Tyler Ulis is a great point guard and no disrespect to him because he is really good and his numbers and production speaks for itself. But it moved Jamal off the ball because he shot it so well," Blunt said. "Yet when he has the ball in his hands, the world has not seen his ability to facilitate.

"It's just a great tribute to Ulis and (John) Calipari and his staff of being able to put guys in right spots and Jamal being able to slide off and sacrifice some of the things that make him so good to help his team have a chance to win."

Want more? "Jamal scores it so easily and effortlessly. We needed him to score to win even though we had eight kids sign Division I off that team and will probably end up with 12," Blunt said. "He was able to facilitate and make guys better. He had nights where he went for 40, 50 points. He can really score, hit game-winners. He can shoot it when he walks into the gym."

Blunt never worried about Murray when he sometimes struggled early in the season and didn't always play with the efficiency that Calipari wanted.

"Jamal is Jamal. You can't shake him. You can't rattle him. He's just very focused kid. His father has done a lot with mental preparation. We know Jamal. He's stayed true to himself and kept his focus and just kept getting better. But what is crazy is that the world has not seen how good he is which is really scary to be able to say that," Blunt said.

Scary for sure and makes it easy to understand why Blunt has no question about how he will do in the NBA.

"I think at his size when you can't help off from different places and the floor is spread even more with his size, quickness, ability to get in the lane and ability to shoot the ball, he's going to be special," Blunt said. "When he has the ball in his hands more he is an all-star type kid. He is that special."

Blunt worked out to watch Murray play five

times this season, including the SEC Tournament. He talks to him some but tries to "stay out his way" because of all he has to focus on daily.

"His family has been great and our whole network is really supporting him. We are always there if he needs us. We stay in touch but stay out of his way," Blunt said.

However, Murray's popularity continues to soar in Canada where most Kentucky games can be seen on TV.

"TSN is the ESPN of Canada. When Andrew Wiggins played at Kansas they started covering games and it kind of became something that was common practice," Blunt said. "Every (UK) game was televised."

"It is cool to see guys that watched him grow up and see him get to where he is now be able to watch him and have something to shoot for. He shows them the road map to follow and that they can stay in Canada and do it. That is really cool for kids who want that option."

Asst. Kenny Payne

Kentucky freshman Isaac Humphries spent a lot of time with assistant coach Kenny Payne this season and says he is "awesome" to work with.

"He is so hard as a coach but as soon as you finish a workout with him, you just love it. He's the best person off the court ever," Humphries said. "He is extremely tough on the court but that is why we all love him so much. When you finish any time with him you know you have gotten so much better just from that small amount of time."

"We all respect him very much and we know what he does is the best for you. He's hard, but fair."

Kentucky coach John Calipari insists Payne is harder on players than he is -- and Humphries agreed.

"I know that is very hard to believe because off the court he is such an awesome guy. But he just expects a lot from us in a good way and doesn't settle for anything less than our best and he just makes us where we get better every day. If we don't, he lets us know," Humphries said.

Unwavering Faith

One thing that never changes for Calipari is his faith and he visited St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Des Moines several times last week. Monsignor Frank Chiodo told the Des Moines Register that they had a "great conversation" during the NCAA Tournament.

"He was very warm, a typical southern Italian," Chiodo said.

He told the newspaper that both their families came from the same part of Italy and both their grandfathers worked as coal miners after coming to the United States. Chiodo said the coach was surprised to find an Italian parish in Des Moines, especially one with so much history.

Calipari posted several pictures on Twitter of a mural outside the Italian American Cultural Center of Iowa.

Not in Bloomington

Calipari spent a lot of time explaining last week why no longer plays Indiana annually both before and after the Hoosiers beat his team. He readily admitted he did not want to play in Bloomington and talked about deciding what worked best for his program.

"It's just that you have to figure out how many home and homes you really want to play and when you come down to it you just -- look,



Jamal Murray finished the season averaging 20 points per game but his high school coach says the best is yet to come from him. (Vicky Graff Photo)

we should be playing -- if you hear Kansas, Louisville, North Carolina, Indiana, UCLA, Duke, well, you can't play everybody. Well you should you're at Kentucky, really?" Calipari said.

"Why don't we all play everybody and we'll just do a round robin between those nine programs and that will be our non-conference schedule? We'll play each other. I'll go for it if everybody else does. Well I'll have my hand up by myself. We play who we play and they play who they play and it's done."

"We've added the CBS Classic with North Carolina and the guys, we've added the ESPN Classic with Duke and the guys. We've got a game in the Bahamas and we play a couple other games that are home and homes and we got that (SEC - Big 12) Challenge, which I can't stand. January, had to go to Kansas. Come on."

Bottom line: Scheduling has worked out just fine for UK and Calipari without Indiana. I loved that rivalry, Register that they had to go other directions, then I think he's more than earned

the right to do that.

Still, he was asked again about playing Indiana after the NCAA loss.

His answer: "In Indianapolis (on a neutral court)."

Last Game For Ulis

My guess is that Tyler Ulis has played his last game at Kentucky, which is a loss for not only UK basketball but college basketball. The 5-9 guard was fearless and so, so entertaining to watch play. But he also captured the hearts of Kentucky fans of all kinds.

I'm not even sure I quite realized just how much so many people respected Ulis until I checked Twitter late in Saturday's loss to Indiana and then right after the game.

Kentucky senior football player Landon Foster (@BigBlueKick12) posted late in the game: "I don't know what back workouts @tulis3 does, but I need to start them because he's carrying the entire state of Kentucky on his back."

He did against Indiana, but also did almost all season.

Here's a few more of the tweets that jumped out to



Tyler Ulis had 27 points in UK's loss to Indiana Saturday and if it was his final game at Kentucky he'll leave as one of the most beloved Cats of all time. (Vicky Graff Photo)

me:

Matt Jones (@KySportsRadio): "Tyler Ulis was amazing tonight as he has been his whole career. Gonna miss him a great deal. Not sure any player in UK history got more out of his talent and size than Tyler Ulis. Awesome to get to watch him play."

Evan Daniels (@EvanDaniels), Scout.com recruiting director: "Have a feeling that's the last time Tyler Ulis wears a Kentucky jersey. He's the ultimate competitor. What a college basketball player."

Rich Brooks (@UK-coachbrooks): "Very tough loss for the Cats! Ulis was a

great player to watch."

UK soccer coach Jon Lipsitz (@UKCoachLipsitz): "Thank you Tyler Ulis. You're so talented, yet nothing matches your heart. You're going to be one heck of a pro."

He could be. But if he's not, he was so much fun to watch and I doubt in my lifetime if I will ever see another player exactly like him at Kentucky -- or anywhere else.

Contact Larry

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

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Isaac Humphries was all smiles cutting the net after UK's SEC Tournament championship. He says assistant Kenny Payne is hard on players because he wants the best for them. (Wade Upchurch Photo)