

Ulis is "Amazing"



Larry Vaught

Kentucky freshman Isaac Humphries says as much as he watches Tyler Ulis, he sometimes still is surprised by what his 5-9 teammate does for Kentucky.

"He's just amazing. He's so much fun to watch," said Humphries. "We all see him do some incredible things, and then we see something new. You just never know what he's going to do."

Texas A&M assistant coach Rick Stansbury, a Kentucky native, calls Ulis "special" for many reasons and he was certainly that against the Aggies Sunday.

"Some things he does do not even show up on the stat sheet. That leadership. Those kids feed off him so much. He effects the game at that size offensively, defensively, creating for others as much as any kid we have had in this league in a long time," Stansbury said after the Southeastern Conference Tournament championship game Sunday won by Kentucky.

"Then you put a guy like (Jamal) Murray beside him and you can't leave him because his game has really elevated in the last six weeks or so. They have one of the best backcourts in the country, if not the best."

All Ulis did in the title game was score 30 points, hand out five assists, grab three rebounds, make three steals and play all 45 minutes to help earn tourney MVP honors. He's now had a UK single-season record 14 games with at least 20 points and five assists and has had at least four assists in 27 straight games. He's sixth nationally in assists at 7.2 per game and head of the school record pace of 6.5 per game John Wall had in 2009-10.

While Stansbury says

he's not sure where the season Ulis has had should rank among the all-time best individual seasons at UK, he doesn't remember a player that Kentucky has depended on so much.

"Last year they had more balance, more players and then spread it around. I would have to think long and hard about if Kentucky depended on one player so much to impact their whole team. It would be a long time if there ever was one," Stansbury, a former head coach at Mississippi State, said.

Ulis' statistics are remarkably similar to what Wall had during his one season at Kentucky. Wall became the No. 1 overall pick in the NBA draft while the 5-9 Ulis is being projected as a mid-second round pick.

"I would have thought Ulis maybe had better stats because he was asked to do more. John Wall had some other players with him. Guys along that back line that were huge when Wall played," Stansbury said. "Ulis again, so much is based on that perimeter deal for Kentucky."

"It has been a long time since you have had a Kentucky team that was not dependent on the paint and had to rely so much on that perimeter game of Ulis and Murray."

Stansbury saw Ulis play as a high school player in Chicago. He remembers he was quick and could score. But he never envisioned this type of collegiate career for Ulis, the SEC Player of the Year as well as the SEC Defensive Player of the Year.

"You never know exactly how a kid will develop and know what they are going to do. That mindset, you just never know what is inside of them," Stansbury said. "You just have to be right more than you are wrong. It's very obvious he has done things to make himself better and Cal (John Calipari) has put him in position to be successful and help their team win and be so impactful."

Ulis came to UK without the hoopla of many Calipari recruits. He was regarded as a "four-year player" by most and from day one has felt he had to prove to everyone that he could play at a high



Kentucky guard Tyler Ulis talked to fans in Nashville Sunday after UK won the SEC Tournament title and he was named the tournament's most valuable player. (Wade Upchurch Photo)

level like he has.

"Those kind of guys tend to be your best players sometimes. They don't come in with all that hoopla about them. They come in and go to work. They don't let patting them on the back change them a lot," Stansbury said. "You hear about Ulis being a great kid with great character. Put the type of kid he is with those abilities and that is why he has become a very, very special player not just in this league but around the country."

Surprise, Surprise!

What a surprise that Kentucky landed in the same NCAA Tournament bracket with Indiana and will face the Hoosiers Saturday in Des Moines, Iowa, if both win their first games in the East Region.

Kentucky is the No. 4 seed — somehow Texas A&M got a three seed — and Indiana a No. 5 seed. Kentucky opens play with Stony Brook Thursday night about 9:45 after Indiana plays Tennessee-Chattanooga. Look for the UK-Indiana game to be in prime time Saturday night if both win.

During the SEC Tournament Calipari took several shots at the NCAA selection committee that put UK in line for a possible third game against No. 1 seed North Carolina. Calipari's friend, West Virginia coach Bob Huggins, joked before the pairings were made that his team would also be in Kentucky's bracket to make sure both he and Calipari did not make the Final Four. Guess what? West Virginia is also in the East Region.

Kentucky-Indiana had annually played during the regular season before Calipari and Indiana coach Tom Crean could not agree on extending the series after the Hoosiers won at home in the 2011-12 season and fans stormed the court, something Calipari did not like.

"I told Tom (Crean) three weeks ago that we would be playing them. I said, 'West Virginia, you, and my prediction was Kansas.' He'll tell you. He just called me," Calipari said Sunday night. "The problem is, you're affecting more than one; you're affecting a lot. And, they'll say it's all conspiracy, and I hear it all. But it's fine."

So was the selection committee intent on making the two play?

"I have no idea. You'll have to ask the people on the committee. I am telling you, they will come up with some great numbers and land in Florida for you. I am just telling you," Calipari said.

Later he went on ESPN and didn't let up on the selection committee.

"It is a moving target

different in Nashville.

I always try to see April Peal, a die-hard fan I met a few years ago who is an emergency room doctor in Columbia, Tenn. However, she took her "UK craziness" to a new level this year with what she wore to the game.

"I decided it would be fun to dress up. After the LSU game I was at dinner with friends and had one randomly said I should wear a tutu to the SEC tourney," Peal said. "Everyone agreed so I got online then and ordered one off of Amazon!"

It arrived in time for her to wear to Bridgestone Arena and it was quite a hit with fans, especially since her father had on blue-and-white overalls and a blue wig. Numerous fans, and not just UK fans, stopped them to ask for pictures.

"Everyone is like, 'That's awesome' or 'Oh my.' I took lots of pictures," Peal, a western Kentucky native, said.

She also had on her UK cowboy boots that she wore to the 2014 Final Four in Dallas as well as a blue necklace, sunglasses and ear rings that all had blinking blue lights — and she was not the least bit amused when an usher told her to turn off the lights.

Peal has tickets to the Final Four in Houston and

is hoping UK will earn another Final Four trip. If not, she's already prepared for future SEC Tournaments.

"I got tickets last year for all nine of the already scheduled SEC tournaments in Nashville. I'm ready," she said.

Shelburne Likes UK

Country music singer J.D. Shelburne put on four shows that were filled with Kentucky fans in Nashville during the SEC Tournament. He said he always tries to arrange his schedule to play downtown Nashville when the city is hosting the SEC tourney.

Shelburne worked numerous references to UK basketball into his songs/show and thinks his Cats could make a big run.

"I grew up reading the Spencer Magnet (in Taylorsville) and following the Wildcats all I could," he said. "That's never changed and now UK fans are so great to me and the shows we had here were crazy with the UK fans."

Contact Larry

Remember you can contact me at larryvau@gmail.com or on Twitter at @vaughtsviews. You can also see more of my work at www.lex18.com and www.vaughtsviews.com.



Kentucky coach John Calipari was upset with Isaiah Briscoe and let him know during the SEC Tournament. He was even more upset with the NCAA selection committee and also let them know.

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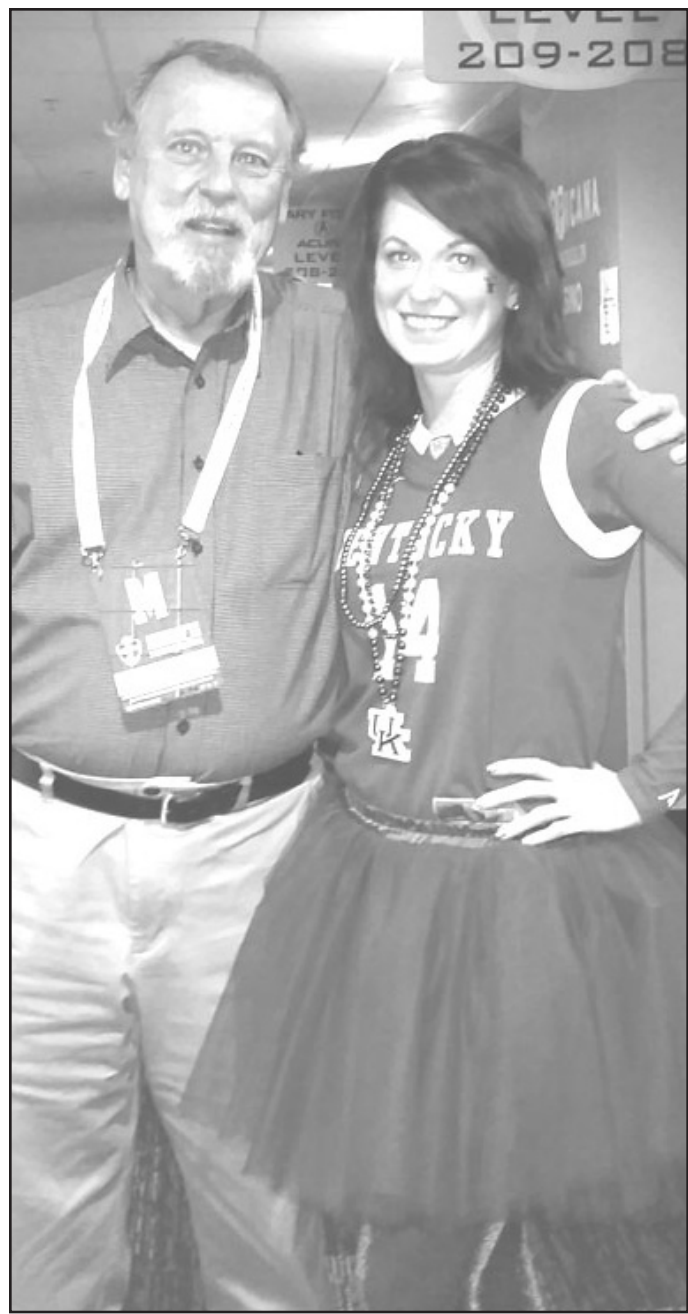
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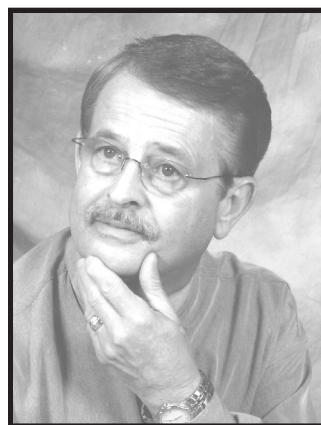
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April Peal is an emergency room physician in Columbia, Tenn., but the western Kentucky native is a die-hard UK fan and wore the blue tutu to prove it during the SEC Tournament. Larry Vaught is on the left. (Larry Vaught/Verizon Photo)

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