

Elam Counted On To Be Middle Of Defensive Line



Larry Vaught

Before the Blue-White Game reached halftime, some Kentucky fans were complaining on Twitter about the play of junior nose guard Matt Elam.

Out of shape. Too upright. Not aggressive. Gets pushed out of the way too easy. Lacks intensity.

Elam knows the criticism is there. He picked UK over Alabama and during his first two seasons he has not met the lofty expectations most had for him. He filled in as a starter last year after Melvin Lewis was hurt, and this season Kentucky is counting on him to be the man in the middle of the defensive line.

"That is something I never cared about," said Elam when asked about fan comments. "That is just some guy behind his computer saying how he feels. I know people talk about LeBron (James) and Kobe (Bryant) and look who they are. I don't pay attention to it. I know what it takes to be good."

Apparently his coaches believe him based on what they saw this spring.

"I've seen Matt become better fundamentally. You know, Matt is 6-5 and he's really big, so one of his weaknesses is he's got to play low. He's naturally higher than everybody else, and I think I saw improvement in that throughout the spring. Matt certainly has things that he can get better at, but I think he got better at playing low," defensive coordinator D.J. Eliot said. Head coach Mark Stoops was a bit more blunt.

"I think Matt knows when he's counted on to be 'the guy,' you've got to be in shape to play a bunch of snaps and you've gotta play at a high level. We're count-

ing on him to be the guy and Matt has made progress in certain areas. He's certainly strong in the run game; we need to get him in shape where he can handle a bunch of plays and not sub as much. He's closer. He's got some work to do," Stoops said.

Elam doesn't mind the high expectations coaches — and fans — are putting on him.

"That doesn't bother me. I am not one of those guys who gets scared and doesn't want this pressure on me," Elam said. "You can put a lot on me. I don't care. I will just play and do what I need to do."

"I can see stuff now before it is going to happen before you start thinking and get messed up and they snap the ball and you are off-sides or something like that. It's just way easier now for me. I am more comfortable. I know how things are going. I can see stuff easier. More relaxing. I'm just better whether some people want to believe it or not."

For those worried about his conditioning, including Stoops, he says he will be fine by the time summer ends.

"I know I still have to get my weight better playing-wise. That just comes with it," Elam said. "But now that spring practice is over, I can get back to worrying more about that. During practice, I wanted to learn everything I could and put all the time I could into football."

Impressive Golfer

Kentucky freshman golfer Anna Hack of Calloway County has had an impressive last two months. Of her last 15 rounds, 14 were in the 70s and she finished 23rd in the Southeastern Conference Tournament — her third straight top 50 finish. She opened with a 5-over par 77 but then came back with 73 in each of the next two rounds.

She won the 2012 Kentucky High School Athletic Association individual state championship with rounds of 68 and 74 and finished in the top 10 three times in the seven KHSAA state championships she participated in at Calloway County. She had 73 top-five finishes in statewide, national



Kentucky coach Mark Stoops admits he worries about potential off-field distractions/incidents since it will be over three months before he can officially have his team back at practice. (Vicky Graff Photo)

and Junior PGA Tour events during her junior career.

Maybe that tenacity is in her blood. Her uncle is former Kentucky quarterback Billy Jack Haskins. He was one of the toughest players I've ever watched play football at Kentucky.

Caldwell County High School alum Emma Talley, an Alabama senior, won the NCAA championship last year and finished fourth in the SEC tourney.

Kentucky sophomore Chip McDaniel of Clay County was second in the men's SEC tourney with a 1-under par total -- two shots behind winner Lee McCoy of Georgia.

Alvis Johnson

During my 41-year journalism career, I've been lucky enough to attend many, many special events. However, I don't think I've every enjoyed one any more than last week's celebration in Harrodsburg of the distinguished education/coaching career of Alvis Johnson.

He sent over 40 athletes to college on scholarships in football and/or track. He was being honored on

the 30th anniversary of the Heart of the Bluegrass Invitational, a track meet he started. Former players, coaches and rival coaches talked. So did peers who taught with him at Harrodsburg High School.

Johnson's two sons, Dennis and Derrick Johnson, both played football at Kentucky — and Dennis was an all-SEC defensive end after being the USA Today Defensive Player of the Year in high school. I still remember 40 years ago when he sent Henry Parks and Venus Meaux to play at Kentucky. However, even though I've known Johnson for over 40 years, I didn't realize until last week that he had two former athletes working at the Pentagon.

Colonel James Jones was a state champion sprinter and part of a state championship team at Harrodsburg. He spoke about how Johnson believed in him before he believed in himself. What Jones didn't say was that he was at the Pentagon on 9/11.

Lieutenant General Theodore Nicholas finished third in the two-mile run at the



Matt Elam says fan criticism does not bother him and he's convinced he can be a productive nose guard for UK next season. (Vicky Graff Photo)

state track meet for Johnson in 1974. He was nominated by President Obama to become assistant director of national intelligence for partner engagement.

He could not attend the ceremony due to a conflict, but sent a hand-written three-star note to Johnson where he explained he changed his major at Western Kentucky because of Johnson's influence on him as a history teacher as well as his coach. Nicholas has the second highest rank in the U.S. Army and noted that he even used Johnson's training regimen with his soldiers.

Bell's Maci Morris

Kentucky freshman Maci Morris of Bell County said it was "sweet" of UK freshman linebacker Kash Daniel of Paintsville to say her doing so well on the basketball court inspired him to believe he could contribute as a freshman next season, too.

"I know he has a bright future because his work ethic is just unbelievable. I know his family through my dad because our parents went to college together. If I am an inspiration to him, he is an inspiration to me as well. We are both from the mountains and that is something to be proud of," Morris said.

Like Daniel, she is proud to represent eastern Kentucky.

"I know they are proud of me and they wish me luck. I try my best to represent where we come from," she said. "Everybody back home is always telling me they are super proud of me and wishing me super luck. I think all the fans love having us here at Kentucky."

Contact Larry

Wonder what Mark Stoops' biggest concern is before the team can start pre-season workouts in August?

"I think you always have to worry as a coach when I have 85 little babies over there that they handle themselves off the field the right way. That's what I told them I was very proud of the work that they have done this winter and this spring. We have been very consistent in our approach. I thought we were definitely growing up. We have to stay the course that way right now," Stoops said after the Blue-White

Game.

"But we can't afford to take any time off. They have to get back in there. But they will have more time, as we know, socially and things like that. But that always worries you that they continue to handle themselves the right way off the field when you have so many guys and this weather's breaking and the town's packed right now and a lot of things are going on. So, we definitely warned them about that."

But if I had any doubts about whether Stoops was pleased overall with spring practice, they went away when he was asked if UK was now strong enough to compete in the SEC.

"I think we're much improved. To say that you're ever strong enough, I mean, that's like being -- I can't be any prettier or have too much money, you know what I mean? You know," Stoops laughed and said. "So, I don't know if we're strong enough yet. We're going to play some awfully physical teams."

Since he was so jovial, I took a chance and immediately asked if he was saying he was pretty.

"Oh, yeah, I definitely am pretty," Stoops joked. After a pause, he added, "We know that's not true."

To me, that's a coach who liked the way spring practice went.

Air Raid Siren Go?

Does the Air Raid siren at Commonwealth Stadium need to go? When coach Hal Mumme arrived with his high-octane offense, the siren started sounding. But now it seems some fans are ready for it to be gone since UK no longer is an Air Raid offense.

Former UK running back Anthony White, who played for Mumme, thinks it is time to do away with the siren. So does WLAP (630 AM) Sunday Morning Sports host Mark Buerger and many listeners agreed with him and White on Twitter Sunday.

One who didn't was Derek Kirby: "My 16-year-old son and 19-year-old daughter say keep the siren. UK has zero traditions. To them, this is one."

Contact Larry

Do you have an opinion? If so, let me know at larryvau@gmail.com or @vaughtsviews on Twitter.



Maci Morris says she's proud to represent eastern Kentucky just like Kash Daniel is on the UK football team. (Vicky Graff Photo)

WKU To Host Kentucky Science Olympiad, Sat.

Estill County Middle School students will among 700 students from across the state of Kentucky that will be competing in the Kentucky Science Olympiad this coming Saturday, April 23, 2016. The event is hosted by Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green.

Students on 24 middle school teams and 24 high school teams will compete in 23 events including anatomy, dynamic planet, food science, meteorology, helicopters, astronomy, chemis-

try, computer science, biology, geology, physics and more.

The top team in both middle and high school divisions will advance to the national competition in May.

The competition begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 2:45 p.m. at various locations around campus.

More information about the Science Olympiad is available online at <http://www.wku.edu/scienceolympiad/> and www.soinc.org or contact Lowell Shank at lowell.shank@wku.edu.

Attention Veterans

A Veterans Benefits Field Representative will be at the National Guard Armory, 335 Cow Creek Road, Ravenna, on Thursday, May 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.

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