

Wiltjer Returns For Great Kentucky Reception



Larry Vaught

After Gonzaga got beat in the NCAA Tournament, former Wildcat Kyle Wiltjer thought he would just come back to Kentucky to visit former teammates and friends.

Instead, his trip turned into an autograph tour across the state that drew plenty of UK fans as well as media members wanting to talk to him about his two years with the Wildcats.

Wiltjer admits his story is "interesting" because his transfer worked out well for him as well as Kentucky. Wiltjer was part of UK's 2012 national title team.

"No one has done this before. This is something unique. The fact I transferred and then came back and got this kind of reception, I can't thank everyone enough," Wiltjer said.

Wiltjer knew Gonzaga fans, who are very rabid about basketball, probably would not believe the fan turnout he got.

"They have a similar culture over there so they may believe it, but it is such a bigger scale here. You come to Harrodsburg, a small town, and all these people come out to say hi. You have all these little cities with fans coming out and that makes it cool," Wiltjer said.

"It was an amazing ride for me in college. I had two amazing years at Kentucky and then had a great time at Gonzaga and made the tournament both times. It's just an amazing feeling the way UK fans are still treating me. I am really at a loss for words. The love UK fans have given me is just overwhelming."

Same for his feelings about

John Calipari. Wiltjer left UK on good terms with Calipari and it has stayed that way.

"We talk all the time. I transferred and a lot of times it is because something went down or someone is not happy and that wasn't the case with me," Wiltjer said. "I think people are surprised when they see not only did I leave on good terms, but they still stay up with me and follow my progress."

"When I transferred, he told me he wanted me back but also said he knew I could reach my dreams anywhere if I worked hard. I just decided I would leave, but he was awesome the whole time. He didn't want me to leave, but he helped me. It's a tough decision as a kid to determine where to go and then transfer."

"He would text me before big games or text me congrats after a good game. I still feel very comfortable with him and he is someone who has meant a lot to me. He is a straight shooter and really cool. He followed through on everything he ever told me."

Could Be Point Guard

NBA draft analyst Ed Isaacson thought Tyler Ulis could be a NBA point guard. He said months ago that he thought if Ulis could find the right fit, he would be a good backup point guard for a team and a likely second-round draft pick.

Now Ulis is a consensus All-American, has put his name in to the NBA draft and is being projected as a first-round draft pick in many mock drafts.

"I don't think him declaring (for the draft) is a bad move. Not sure there's much more he would be able to prove at the college level, and is coming off a tremendous season," Isaacson said. "I still don't think he is a first-round pick because I see him maxing out as an NBA back-up, and that's after probably spending some time in the D-League."

"Could he go in the first round? It's definitely possible, especially late in the first if a good team is just looking to shore up their bench, but I still think there would be better uses for a first rounder, and I



Kyle Wiltjer spent a week touring Kentucky where he signed autograph for fans and the former Wildcat admitted he was stunned by the Kentucky fan turnout. (Larry Vaught/Verizon Photo)

plan on keeping his draft value more in line with the early second round."

Isaacson posts his work at <http://NBADraftBlog.com> and knows draft day often brings "odd decisions" and knows that could happen with Ulis.

"I honestly wouldn't be surprised if he went as high as 20. I just don't think it would be a smart decision," Isaacson said.

More Than Numbers

Ulis was about more than the numbers at Kentucky. Not that his numbers were not brilliant, but UK fans loved him for a lot more than his statistics.

Keely Potts, the girlfriend of UK junior Derek Willis, got a call that her grandmother had Alzheimer's this year right after she let Willis out of the car and he had already gone into Wildcat Lodge.

"Tyler and Isaiah (Briscoe) were walking out of the lodge and saw me crying and ran to my car and opened my door and started to comfort me," Potts said. "It meant a lot. They didn't even know what was wrong. But that's the kind

of guy Tyler is. He's there for everybody."

Former Wildcat Anthony Epps, who was on UK's 1996 national championship and the 1997 team that lost in the title game, admired what Ulis did this year.

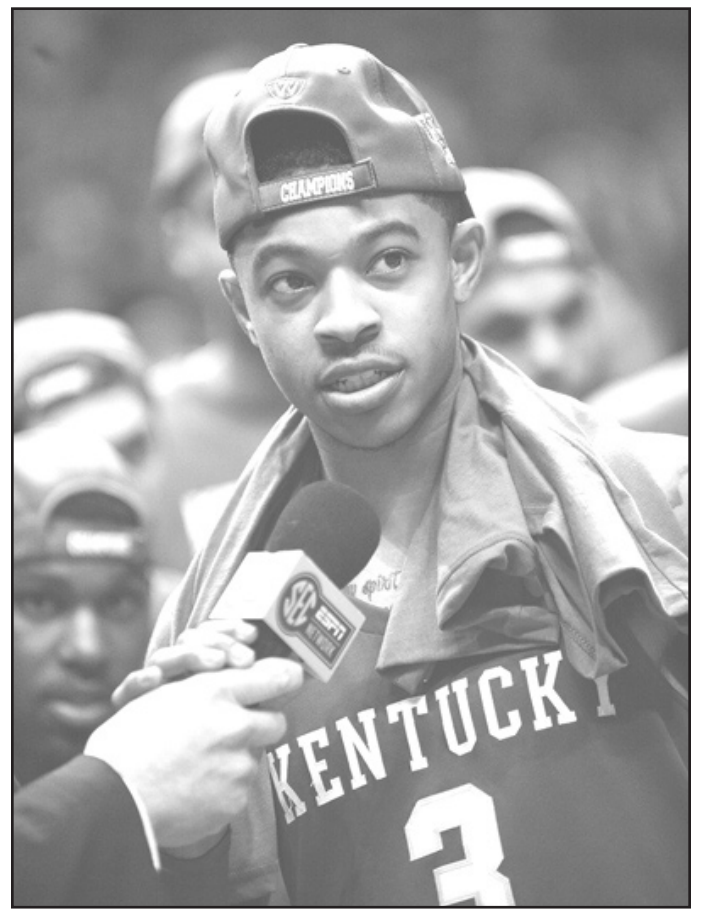
"He was a coach on the floor and his teammates respected him. He was the heart and soul of the team. Led by example," Epps said.

Cortez Hale is a high school coach in Chicago who watched Ulis in high school. He also happened to be the high school coach of another former UK player — Anthony Davis.

"He's one of the best point guards Calipari will ever have. True point guard and leader," Hale said. "Ulis made a believer out of me after one high school game. Can't teach heart and determination."

Kentucky signee De'Aaron Fox is expected to be Calipari's point guard next season. He had already said it would be "great" to play with Ulis as well. However, he said before playing in the Nike Hoop Summit that he had expected Ulis to turn pro.

"The year he had, he might



Kentucky fans will remember Tyler Ulis for a lot more than just the numbers he posted during his two-year career. (Wade Upchurch Photo)

not have had that again," Fox said. "The way he runs the team is special. It's like he has the keys to the Ferrari. That's the way I now have to run the team."

Fox admits he was a bit surprised at just how good Ulis was this season -- just like almost everyone else was.

"Just the way he ran the team was so impressive. He was the smallest player and averaged the most points. Just the overall impact he had on the team will be the toughest to replace. You just don't see a player like that very often," Fox said.

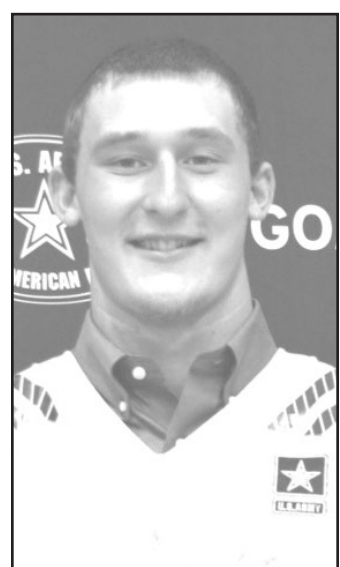
All-American Beggs

Congrats to UK senior pitcher Dustin Beggs for being named a midseason first-team All-American by Perfect Game. I am not sure I had ever heard of a midseason All-American, but no one can argue with Beggs' numbers as he is doing all he can to enhance his draft status.

He became the only Kentucky pitcher to win his first seven starts this season when he had a 2.74 ERA in 49 1/3 innings. He struck out 43 and walked just seven while opponents hit only .197. He had a brilliant performance in his eighth start against Alabama Saturday when he struck out one, allowed four hits and walked only one in seven innings. He gave up an unearned run but did not factor in the decision when UK scored four times in the ninth to win 6-2.

The Georgia native is 14-4 in 22 starts at UK with 128 strikeouts and only 28 walks in 150 innings.

Freshman QB's?



Army All-American Landon Young believes competing in track and wrestling both help him with football skills that could let him contend for playing time as a true offensive lineman next season.

Kentucky offensive coordinator Eddie Gran he would have no problem playing a true freshman offensive lineman.

That's why Woodford County's Drake Jackson and Lafayette's Landon Young could both play this year. Jackson graduated early and is on campus backing up center

Jon Toth. Young will arrive on campus in June.

"If they're ready to go, let's go, because you know what? In game six, game eight, they might be able to help us win," Gran said about freshmen offensive linemen. "Then it's going to be beneficial to us in year two and year three, a guy that's got to step in there and go."

"If they're physically ready to go, if they're mentally ready to go — a little bit more for an offensive lineman — but if they can go let's put them in. There's no reason not to. I think it's important. I think it helps your team down the road."

Young didn't enroll early like Jackson because he also competes in wrestling (he won the state heavyweight title in February) and track where he hopes to win the discus and shot put Class AAA state titles next month.

"I think track helps a lot with football. You have to be able to have precise technique and explosiveness in your hips and legs to get the shot out there 60 feet. It builds muscle memory and strength," Young said. "Wrestling is also a lot about footwork. It's just one-on-one, just like in football. The aggressiveness, leverage and angles are all big factors in football and they are all emphasized in wrestling. I would not be the athlete I am today if not for wrestling."

So which sport is the toughest? Young didn't hesitate with his answer.

"No matter what level you go to -- middle school, high school, college -- I believe any level of wrestling is by far harder than any other sport, including football," he said. "College wrestling is harder than college level football practice or games. I firmly believe that."

Impressive Feat

One of the most impressive feats connected with any UK athlete last week was turned in by Kendra Harrison. The former UK track standout began her 2016 season at Georgia's Spec Towns Invitational and turned in fastest season-opening time in the 100-meter hurdles in history.

She ran the race in 12.36 seconds -- the fifth best time ever in American history and ninth best all-time on the 100 hurdles.

Harrison had last competed at the IAAF World Indoor Championships in March, where she advanced to the 60-meter hurdles final two weeks after claiming her second USATF Silver Medal.

Contact Larry

Thanks for reading and remember you can contact me at larryvau@gmail.com or on Twitter @vaughtsviews. You can also see more of my work at vaughtsviews.com and lex18.com.

Estill Extension Youth Safety Day

The Estill County Extension Council and Extension staff had their annual Youth Safety Day on March 24th at the fairgrounds. Fourth grade students from West Irvine Intermediate attended the day of safety education and a mock ATV rescue. Students were pleased to see the

medical helicopter land as part of the mock rescue. Safety education sessions included electric safety demonstration, boating safety, home alone, ATV and farm safety, and internet safety.

Courtesy of agents Isaac L. Hollon and Eric L. Baker



AT LEFT: Touchtone Energy representatives teach electrical safety and demonstrate how power lines can be very dangerous.

AT RIGHT: Randall Moore of Estill County EMS described what action is being taken to secure



the mock rescue victim for transport. The mock rescue would not be possible without the assistance of the Estill County first responders and the Extension Service would like to publically thank them for their help each year.

