# Ky. Signee Says Teammate Is "Phenomenal, Phenomenal, Phenomenal"



## by Larry Vaught

Nickeil Alexander-Walker has one word to describe what type of player his cousin, Kentucky signee Shai Alexander is.

"Phenomenal. Phenomenal. Phenomenal. Phenomenal,"saidAlexander-Walker, who is the Kentucky signee's teammate at Hamilton Heights Christian Academy in Chattanooga. "He sees the floor great. He is really starting to score a lot more.

"He is really unselfish. We have to tell him to get to the basket and score and take over. He does that well but that's not his tendency to be selfish. He is just not like that."

What about off the

"Off the court, that is my brother. He brings you up. You can't be sad around him. A lot of emotion, but great to be around. Nice person, never mean. His smile brings smiles to other people," Alexander-Walker

Shai Alexander is a 6-5 guard and one of five players in UK's 2017 recruiting class. He played at the Marshall County Hoop Fest last month and is scheduled to return to Marshall for another holiday event Feb. 17-18 along with another UK signee, Las Vegas forward P.J. Washington.

The two cousins are from Canada and knew each other well growing up.

his house every weekend to- lege schedule and with this ference play underway, Pratt minute," Calipari said. gether," Walker-Alexander, a guard heading to Virginia to get to class," Fox, who not progressed as quickly as Tech, said. "Sometimes we were together like every day in the summer. We grew up like brothers, not cousins.

"We went hard against each other growing up. It's good that we got that but it never turned into fighting. It was tough, though, and made us who we are today. We just feed off each other. We know each other but he's easy to play with. He makes you look good. That's the best thing about playing with him."

John Calipari has had two Canadians — Jamal Murray and Trey Lyles — turn into NBA first-round draft picks after just one year at productive NBA seasons

and I got to watch Trey at Kentucky. They are both reto a place like Kentucky it just helps you get better."

## Recruiting

Paintsville linebacker Kash Daniel verbally committed to Kentucky early along with two other instate Army All-Americans, Jackson.None wavered in their commitment. Getting UK program.

"Throughout my whole recruiting process I heard, 'Don't go to UK. It's nothing but a basketball school.' For a while there when I first got here, it kind of seemed like that," Daniel said. "The first two losses this season did not help that either.

"Once we started winning and got people back in the stands and could see how much this team has grown over this year, I don't have one regret with coming here. I love this university, love the people, love our coaches, love my teammates a way to spin how having and everybody involved in this program. We've had a good year and can make it even better when we win people to get reps so you this bowl game."

## **Cal Camp**

The semester break always gives Kentucky coach John Calipari extra time to work with his players in what he refers to as "Camp Cal" each year.

didn't anticipate the extra of UK's interior players practices being easy, but would determine the suche's more worried about the cess John Calipari's team

"My biggest adjustment play. "If not my house, it was has been handling a colis from Houston, said. "In high school you were always in one building and but it's true," Pratt, a former it was warm. Now you are UK All-American, said. walking through 30 degree weather, or worse, and it is trying and starting to get different. It's difficult for his rhythm and feel down. I me. I am used to 100-degree see him getting it. He looks weather.

> been in snow but I not used to it. I am not going to say I hate snow, but I would rather be warm than cold any day of the week. Cold is not my favorite thing, so that worries me more than anything Coach can put us through."

## **UK Lady Cats**

Kentucky. Both are having including walk-ons, on the velop and I think they will a player shutting his career roster and just eight that all get it."

"I would love to maxi- Kentucky Hoops coach mize my potential like they Matthew Mitchell balance have done," Shai Alexan- pushing players in practice der said. "I actually played to get better versus makagainst Jamal a little bit in ing sure the players have high school back in Canada enough energy for a long

"It is a real opportunity to ally good and when you go learn as a coach and try to figure that out. That is just a work in progress. You are practice them and it is a different way then we have had before," Mitchell said.

He said despite demanding, tough practices, he says it has been more of a "men-Landon Young and Drake tal" battle for the players than it has been physically.

"We have to do a good to play in the TaxSlayer job as coaches of letting Bowl last week more than them know that you have justified the faith he had in more than enough to get the coach Mark Stoops and the job done. The team (Washington) that sent us home last year (in the NCAA Tournament) played five people, six tops and every now and then got a seventh player in there. So we can do it, you just have to have that belief," Mitchell said.

"So as a coach, we are trying to work our way through that and it is a different team but every year is always different and you always have to figure out the best way to get that particular team to perform. We are practicing really hard."

Mitchell has even found fewer players has helped in

"You don't have as many can move through things and the time that you are out there on the court isn't as long," Mitchell said.

## **Not Progressing**

Before the season started, Kentucky Radio Network analyst Mike Pratt told me Freshman De'Aaron Fox he thought the development would have in postseason

weather, it's hard for me readily admits the bigs have he expected.

"Cal will never say that, "Bam (Adebayo) is really comfortable and that's what "I have seen snow and is important. Until you are comfortable, you feel hesitant. Some guys just take longer than others to get it. But I do like where Bam is

"Isaac Humphries has shown flashes but has been inconsistent. Same with Kenyan (Gabriel) and Sacha (Killeya-Jones). But they With only 11 players, still have a lot of time to de-

# play regularly, how does

Kentucky signee Walker Wood, center, had an emotional thank you for his parents when he received the Paul Horning Award as the state's top football player from Hornung, left. (Larry Vaught Photo)

## **QB Walker Wood**

Lafayette quarterback Walker Wood won the Paul Hornung Award given by the Louisville Quarterback Club to the state's top high school football player. His acceptance speed was quite moving.

"My mom and dad are trying to figure out how to two great people. My mom is tough, and I have to mention she is also beautiful, loving and would go to the end of the world for me," Wood, a Kentucky signee who will start classes next week, said. "There are a lot of things I could not have done without her.

"My dad is funny, smart and tough. He's been a great example for me. He gets up and works hard every day. He does not let a day go by without putting all he has into that day. He made his mark on me."

He was just as eloquent and thoughtful thanking his coaches and teammates, including four linemen he brought to the awards luncheon with him. He even thanked the high school custodians for what they did for him during his high school

## **All-Stars Sitting Out**

It's not often that one can ask John Calipari that he will not have some kind of opinion about. However, recently he did balk at answering a question.

Calipari was asked what he thought about several key college football players not playing in bowl games to avoid injury and what he would do if one of his players decided to do the same

"I haven't thought a whole lot about it. I saw a couple of those situations where players are doing that. You think about it. You don't want to get hurt before this stuff, and I can understand it, but I would prob-With Southeastern Con- ably have to think about it a

"I just kind of glanced at it. 'Wow, interesting.' But I haven't spent any time really dissecting or, 'Here's why, here's why not,' to where I could think through. ask me that in a couple of weeks I'll have a better answer."

Could it happen in college basketball? Yes. Many feel it did last season when LSU declined a NIT bid to end the career of freshman Ben Simmons. However, many speculated that Simmons had already decided not to play in the NIT to avoid injury — and he did become the No. 1 overall pick in the NBA draft.

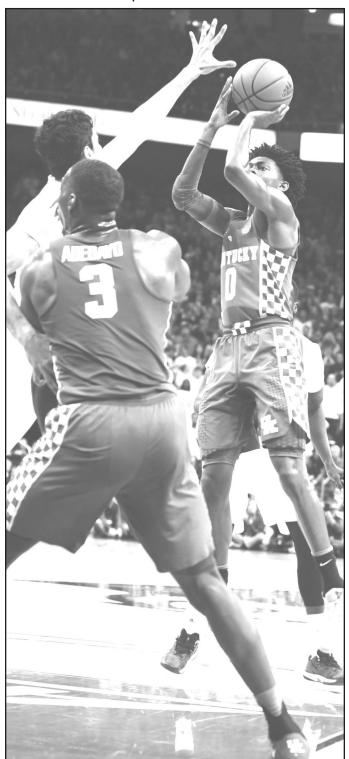
Not sure I could envision down going into the NCAA Tournament, but I could see great players on really bad teams deciding enough was enough and bailing out to avoid the chance of injury.

## **More Half Court**

After Kentucky lost at Louisville, Kentucky coach John Calipari insisted having to play more half-court offense than what the Cats had in other games this sea-

Senior Mychal Mulder hinted that the Louisville loss did send a message to UK about its half-court of-

"We're really good at getting up and down the court, flying, getting transition baskets. When a team wants to play like that in the half court you need to understand what a good shot is, what we're going to run, how we're going to play. Just in case you don't get that transition bucket it's like, what do we go to now?" Mulder said. "I



Freshman De'Aaron Fox has made some dazzling moves on the court, but he says his toughest transition to college basketball has been handling the cold weather in Kentucky. (Vicky Graff Photo)

feel like we've worked on that and we're prepared for

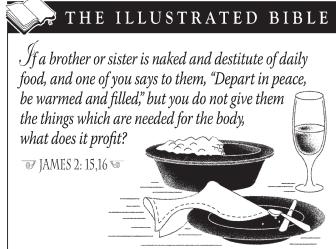
enabled UK's freshmen to see what that atmosphere at road games will be like during SEC play.

understand they hate you tucky's coach then and tried over there. So now com- to recruit Hornung, a standing on the road you get an out running back. idea of what kind of inten-"You walk into those gyms and all their fans want to beat you so bad. It's a huge, Give me some time. If you intense game no matter where we go."

## **Paul Hornung**

Quote of the Week: Mulder said the loss also Paul Hornung played high school football at Flaget in Louisville before going to Notre Dame and winning the Heisman Trophy. Paul 'Going to Louisville, you "Bear" Bryant was Ken-

He wanted me at Kensity those gyms are going to tucky. He was in my home have for you," Mulder said. more than me my senior year," Hornung said. "I thought he was trying to marry my mom. He was a big flirt just like me. I did not know what was going on with him there so much."



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Kentucky Mr. Basketball honors the top high school senior basketball player in the state. How many went to the University of Kentucky?

Vern & Debbie Goodman George & Holly Henry

## GnHenterprise.com

Check the website to find the answer!



The Veterans Benefits Field Representative will be at the Estill County Public Library, 246 Main Street in Irvine, on Thursday, January 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.