

Experience invaluable to any SEC player



by Larry Vaught

Experience normally proves invaluable for Southeastern Conference football players at any school. Kentucky certainly is no exception.

Just ask junior cornerback Derrick Baity, a three-star prospect from Florida. He played all 12 games as a true freshman in 2015, and started four. Last season he started all 13 games and had three interceptions, seven pass breakups and 42 tackles.

"From my freshman year to sophomore year I didn't really understand what was going on. So my sophomore year I got a grip of what is going on. Who is valuable. What is everyone's role," said Baity. "From sophomore to junior season, everybody wants the team to be good rather than I am going to make this selfish play for myself and stuff like that. We all want to be good. It's really scary what that can do for us."

Baity feels he's got "smarter" and is now able to help younger players with their understanding of the game.

He also understands why coach Mark Stoops felt his secondary underperformed last year when it was regarded as the strength of the defense going into last season. Safety Mike Edwards was the best player but Baity and cornerback Chris Westry didn't match the lofty expectations Stoops and others had for them.

"I feel like at the beginning of season last year it (the secondary) was not good. We were embarrassing him (Stoops) because he is a great DB coach. He holds us to a high standard and we didn't meet that standard," Baity said. "But we have the potential to be a good DB group and I think we are going to prove that this season."

"We could have had

more interceptions last year. We could have had more takeaways rather than like batted balls. Just making plays on the ball. We should have done that a lot more."

Baity has extra motivation to do even more now.

"The only motivation I have is that I want to be a great player in the SEC. But my biggest motivation is my son. He is five months old," Baity said Sunday at UK's Media Day. "That has changed my life in a big way. I was one of the leaders on the team who played around a lot. But now since he has been here, I feel like I have matured in a sense of wanting to get better and I have someone to do it for."

He says he gets photos sent to him almost daily of his son, who is in Tampa, and also watches him on FaceTime.

"He can't talk obviously, so I am just like watching him sleep. Sometimes I feel like he is here," Baity said.

Maybe that's part of the reason Baity is so optimistic about this season. Kentucky went 7-6 after an 0-2 start last year and played in the TaxSlayer Bowl. Baity sees an even better season coming.

"I think we can get nine games just on our talent alone. As far as us working hard and like getting in games where it is close and we have to grind out and win, that can give us 10 or 11 wins," he said.

Being a Florida native, he would love to see UK end a 30-year/game losing streak to Florida in late September at Kroger Field. He says players do talk about games and make predictions, but they also have to focus daily and not look ahead.

However, he knows a win over Florida likely would lead to UK fans storming the field no matter what the SEC fine might be for the crowd violation.

"I would love to be part of it. If we were in Lexington last year and beat Louisville, they would have went crazy on us after the game," Baity said. "We still got a little taste of it in Louisville. I want to be part of one of those victories that no one thought we could win and we pull it out. It would be a great

feeling, and we could do it this year."

Williamson at UK?

Rivals.com basketball recruiting writer Krysten Peek predicted months ago that 2018 forward Zion Williamson would pick Kentucky and she still feels the same way.

"I like his fit for Kentucky. The atmosphere is perfect for him. He's a showtime player and would be perfect there," Peek said. "He says he wants to play with Immanuel Quickley, and Quickley is a point guard target for Kentucky."

"But Duke is still very much in the mix. Kansas is in the mix. But I like where Kentucky is sitting. He told me (John) Calipari texts him every other day."

Williamson, who is from Spartanburg, S.C., is ranked No. 2 in the 2018 recruiting class behind Marvin Bagley, is a player Peek believes you have to see in person to fully appreciate.

"You think he is a defensive end in the NFL and there's no way he would be good enough to get up and down the court as quickly as he does and no way he can jump as high as he does," Peek said. "He's a freak of an athlete. They just don't come along like him."

Peek also noted the increased interest Kentucky has in 2019 point guard Ashton Hagans of Oak Hill Academy. He's from the Atlanta area.

"A few places (recruiting sites) have him as the top point guard in the 2019 class," Peek said. "He's quick, aggressive, good defender. I asked him what schools are making him a priority and he told me Kentucky and North Carolina have been at most of his games (this summer)."

Hagans said former UK point guard Rajon Rondo was one of his favorite players. He was at UK's Big Blue Madness last year and admits Calipari's success with one and done players is a big attraction for him.

Thanks from Mom

Last week I was able to share what having her son, Randall Cobb, selected to go into the University of Kentucky Athletics Hall of Fame meant to his

mother, Tina Cobb.

When she saw the column, I got this email response from her:

"Thank you so much. Even though I remember us having this conversation I still got chills and teared up reading this article. Thank you so much Mr Vaught for doing this story. It really means a lot to me that people in Kentucky still love and follow Randall this way! Have a blessed day!" she wrote.

His sister, Melysha, is seven years younger than Randall but any time her parents went to see him play at Kentucky, she was there.

"I really enjoyed hanging out at games," she said. "I actually wanted him to go to Kentucky more than anybody else in our family. I just remember when (former Tennessee coach) Philip Fulmer came to out house to try and recruit Randall after he was committed to Kentucky that I said I would rather see my brother in blue."

"Since we lived so close to Tennessee, everybody kept asking why Tennessee didn't go after him. When they finally did, it was a little too late. He already had a spot in Kentucky and I know I'm sure glad he went to Kentucky. I loved it, and so did he."

Golf All-Americans

Kentucky golfers Stephen Stallings and Chip McDaniel were both named Srixon/Cleveland Golf All-America Scholars by the Golf Coaches Association of America for maintaining a strong grade-point average and performing at a high level in competition.

They have both been tabbed to the SEC Academic Honor Roll in every year of their careers. Stallings is a 2017 graduate with an economics degree. McDaniel is also a business major.

"They both are such bright young men that worked so hard in everything they do. As parents we are so proud of their determination to make their academics a high priority. I can speak for both families knowing Stephen, and Chip, were helped and kept on track by many great people at the University such as Cats Advisor Amy Craiglow and coaches in addition to having a great

foundation built in high school," Pam Stallings, Stephen's mother, said.

"The team actually had the highest GPA in the athletic department. They set their goals at the beginning of each year and made that pledge to coach Craig to accomplish their goal. That's a huge accomplishment! Golfers travel every week beginning in the fall and do not stop until June. It's a year-round sport."

Both played well this year, too, and left Pam Stallings with so many memories. However, one stands out.

"To watch him walk across that stage in cap and gown (at graduation) knowing that you did the best you could do in the classroom and on the course is probably one of a parent's most defining moments," Pam Stallings said.

"The fun we had the last four years with our 'UK Family' with Stephen Jr. Makes walking 23 miles in pouring rain a blessing. Those young men work so hard and it's nice to have a little fun celebrating hard work and accomplishments. Just the opportunity to

compete in a game they love so much is the best!"

Vaught & Conley

I am really looking forward to Thursday, Aug. 10, when I will join Kevin Conley on WSIP (98.9 FM) in Paintsville from 7-7:30 p.m. to talk Kentucky football. It will be Conley's first show to kick off the football season and I am thrilled I will be on with him, especially since this column appears weekly in the Paintsville Herald.

Recently I got to talk to SEC TV Network analyst Cole Cubelic, who picked UK to finish third in the SEC Eastern Division, about Kentucky's offensive line and none of the players being named to any of the preseason all-SEC teams at SEC Media Days.

"The media never gets offensive line voting right. It's always embarrassing," Cubelic, who joined ESPN in 2011, said. "The first team was three tackles, a center and a guard. Second team was three tackles and two centers. Can't put much into it. They just don't know any better. (Kentucky tight end C.J.) Conrad not making all-SEC was also a travesty."



Rivals.com recruiting writer Krysten Peek says UK target Zion Williamson is a "freak athlete" who would fit well into John Calipari's system. (Larry Vaught Photo)



Derrick Baity, right, has extra motivation this season and believes Kentucky can win eight or more games. (Larry Vaught Photo)

Quotes of the Week

Quote of the Week: "Our confidence going through this summer is a lot higher than it was last summer. We know now that we can win big games in tough situations and not just die down in the fourth quarter. I'm excited for what we have in store," Kentucky quarterback Stephen Johnson on this season.

Quote of the Week 2: "I am ranked No. 4 in the state and everybody else ranked 1-9 has an Ohio State (scholarship offer). I do not want one. It just makes me mad, fuels the fire. But I don't pay that much attention to it," Kentucky defensive end commit Alex Reigelsperger.

Quote of the Week 3: "A lot of things come natural to him. He's smart. Guys want to be around him. He's a natural leader. That is what the quarterback position is all about. Guys want to rally around him. That's very rare in somebody who is not yet 18," quarterback coach Quincy Avery on UK quarterback commit Jarren Williams.

SCRAMBLERS

Unscramble the letters within each rectangle to form four ordinary words. Then rearrange the boxed letters to form the mystery word, which will complete the gag!

Gentle

COLIDE

Ask

ENRIQUI

Value

FRITOP

Stew

MIMERS

TODAY'S WORD



"No, actually, the neighbors never complain — there hasn't been a _____ for miles around all summer long."