

Derek Willis holds camps for fellow Native Americans



by Larry Vaught

Derek Willis has had a hectic summer that culminated with him signing a one-year free agent deal with the Detroit Pistons that will have him reporting to training camp Sept. 26.

However, this week he's doing something a bit different — he's holding basketball clinics on four Native American reservations in the Seattle area with help from his fiancée, Keely Potts.

Willis was one of only three Division-I basketball players last season who were Native American. His mother, Trudy, belongs to three tribes: Southern Arapahoe, Pawnee and Creek. Before his family moved back to Bullitt County, he lived for several years on the Wind River Indian Reservation in central Wyoming. He has a variety of Native American-themed tattoos to remind him of his heritage.

"Derek's grandma still lives on a reservation in Wyoming," said Potts. "He has a lot of extended family — second and third cousins — on reservations. They have been trying to get him out there for a while but with his schedule at UK it never worked out. Now he's finally able to do this. There's actually four tribes for us to see."

The couple spent the weekend in Seattle before embarking on the reservation circuit. Potts was especially excited because she had never been on a reservation.

"It's going to be a really good experience for us both. I have some Native American blood, some Blackfoot. That's why I get so tan," she said. "The whole culture, we get to experience it all. Neither of us has been in this area before."

"With so few Native

Americans playing Division I basketball, they are kind of like gods out there. Derek has a lot of support there. It's crazy how many look up to him from the northwest states."

Willis planned a couple of hours of basic skills work each day on the reservations along with time to talk about his personal journey to show campers they should have dreams. "He is a person they look up to, so he wants to interact with him and try to inspire them," Potts, a former UK dance team member who will oversee stretching drills at the camps for Willis, said.

Willis spent part of last week helping with basketball camps at UK and now faces a busy time before training camp starts. Potts said they will move to Michigan later this month and she's already heard from the wives and girlfriends of several players welcoming them into the Detroit family.

"I am really excited. I have heard there is a lot to do there and they say it is pretty and beautiful. I keep hearing great things about Michigan," Potts said.

"I am just so proud of Derek. I wasn't shocked he got a contract. I realize how hard he works. It's nice to have people so happy for him. His old teammates have all been congratulating us. The support has just been out of this world."

"Physical & Nasty"

He never played with quarterback Jarren Williams in high school, but Williams' father, Anthony, saw E.J. Price played when he was a Georgia prep star and knows how good he is.

"He played at Jarren's high school. This dude is physical and nasty. The best offensive tackle that I have seen in high school," Anthony Williams said after E.J. Price committed to Kentucky following his transfer from USC.

The 6-6, 320-pound price Price graduated from Archer High School in Lawrenceville, Ga., but before transferring to Archer as a senior he spent two years at Central Gwinnett High School. That's where UK commit Jarren Williams currently

plays.

"It's an honor for Mr. Williams to say something like that about me," Price said. "I don't know him too well, but he has seen me develop and watch me play for a while. He had eyes on me. With his son as dominant as he is, that is high praise coming from a great father. I really commend all he has done with Jarren. Knowing people feel that way about me really makes me feel good. I just always competed and did my best. I didn't let anything go to my head. I just wanted to do my best."

He knew early during his freshman year at USC that he was going to transfer. Most consider South Carolina a "heavy favorite" for Price with Auburn next because he had relationships with players at both schools. However, Kentucky had a scholarship open where he could take a visit and that was eye-opening for him.

Price was briefly committed to Georgia before going to USC. He also had scholarship offers from Alabama, Arkansas, Auburn, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Miami, Michigan and others coming out of high school.

During his visit to Kentucky, he was impressed by the emphasis the coaches put on the offensive line and that UK had two 1,000-yard rushers last season. One, Benny Snell, was only a freshman and that means he will still be at UK in 2018 when Price can play after sitting out this season as a transfer.

He also liked the connection with offensive line coach John Schlarman.

"I am a good at reading people. If kids are happy with the coaches, you can see it," Price said. "He has a great relationship with his players. I saw him talking to all of them at breakfast. He is always available. I thought that was pretty cool. I saw Drake Jackson, Landon Young going up and watching film and working on team chemistry in the summer."

"Just me seeing that type of stuff let me know those are the type guys I want to be around. They are really serious about what they are doing and perfecting their craft. That is my mindset and I want others around me with the same mindset. I just fell in love with the chemistry of this team. It's really good."

Busy Summers

Kentucky women's basketball commits Blair Green of Harlan County and Emma King of Lincoln County both had busy summers.

Debbie Green, Blair's mother and high school coach, said her daughter played 63 games with the high school team and AAU team. At one point Debbie Green said her daughter's "legs were shot" from playing so many games.

"Her (high school) coach is so thankful that is her last summer of travel ball," Debbie Green said.

Blair Green will be part

of UK's 2018 recruiting class. So will Rhyan Howard, a four-star guard from Cleveland, Tenn. She picked UK over defending national champion South Carolina and Purdue in part because she was looking for a school with a strong engineering program.

Blair Green and Howard played against each other in one national tournament. "They get along great," Debbie Green said. "She's a great girl and a beast on the court."

King will be part of Kentucky's 2019 recruiting class. She played about the same number of games as Green and hit about 40 percent overall from 3-point range.

"She had one bad shooting tournament in Chicago," her father, Eric King, said. "Kentucky coaches have told here they want her at 40 percent from 3-point range, so she is getting there."

In her final two tournaments, she shot 42 percent and 48 percent from 3-point range. Kentucky coach Matthew Mitchell watched her play in the final event at the Kentucky Basketball Academy in Lexington.

It's Not Kentucky

Randall Cobb's father was a Tennessee fan, which is not a big surprise since the family lived in Alcoa, Tenn., just a short distance from the UT campus.

"Randall went to some Tennessee games but I could see he was not excited about Tennessee," Melysha Cobb, his younger sister, said. "He visited Kentucky and was so excited. Everybody just treated us like family."

Cobb was a three-year standout at UK who will go into the Kentucky Athletics Hall of Fame in September. He's now a big-time playmaker with the Green Bay Packers.

"Fans love him at Green Bay, but it's not Kentucky," Melysha Cobb said. "It's way bigger. There are so many stars on the team and everybody has a favorite player. But a lot of fans wear his jersey and that's kind of cool to see."

UK is Improving

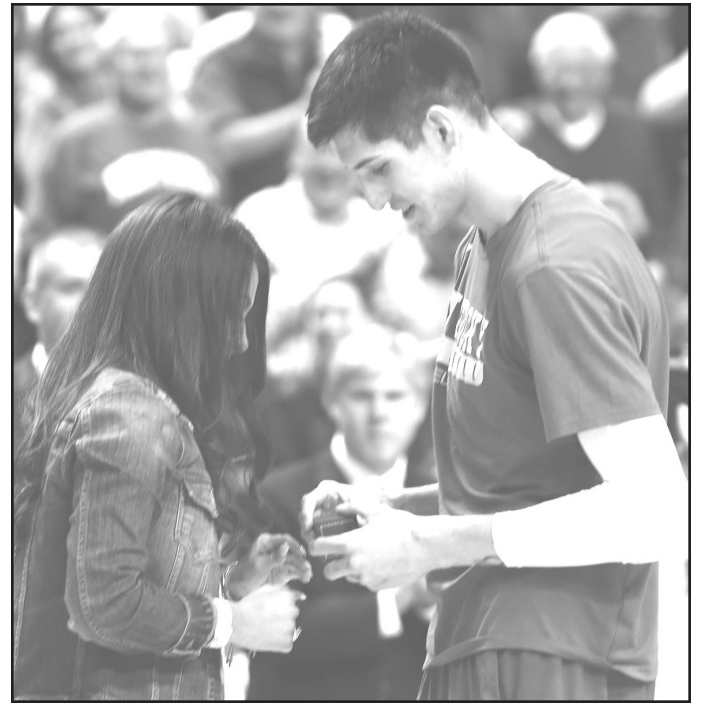
Kentucky is not going to sneak up on any Southeastern Conference opponents this year. Look at what Alistar Penny of dawnofthedog.com posted in his preview of Georgia opponents about Kentucky:

"This is a program that continues to improve and Stoops has done good work on the recruiting trail because of that. With the big Auburn game behind it and a rivalry game against Tech coming next, this could well be a trap game for Georgia. It will be important for Georgia to stay focused and win this game if they want to win the SEC East."

That's the kind of respect Kentucky is getting, and deserves, across the SEC now.

In Memory of Tyler

When Tyler Hicks was killed in an automobile accident in 2012, Scott County boys basketball



Derek Willis proposed to Keely Potts before his final home game. The two are in Washington holding basketball camps on Native American reservations this week before heading to the Detroit Pistons' training camp. (Vicky Graff Photo)



Kentucky commits Blair Green, right, and Rhyan Howard played against each other in AAU play. Green's mother says Howard is a "beast" on the court. (Debbie Green Photo)

coach Billy Hicks knew he wanted to do something to honor his son's memory. Tyler Hicks was an all-state player at Scott and helped Scott reach the 2004 state tournament.

Billy Hicks came up with the Tyler Hicks Memorial Scholarship — a \$5,000 scholarship for four years to a Scott senior athlete or athletic support staff member. Coach Hicks uses money from his summer camps to help fund the scholarship honoring his son along with proceeds from an annual dinner/fundraiser.

I'm thrilled to get to be part of the event Saturday, especially since this column appears in the Georgetown News-Graphic. Former Ken-

tucky quarterbacks Freddie Maggard and Jared Lorenzen will be the featured speakers and I will be there to ask questions and let those attending hear inspirational stories both players can offer.

My column also goes in the Interior Journal in Stanford and I will be in Stanford Sunday for the PBK Bank/WPBK-FM Death Valley Bowl dinner to hear former Marine Matthew Bradford speak. His story is also inspirational and I hopefully will share some of his comments in a future column.

And for my Harrodsburg Herald readers, I will be speaking at the Harrodsburg Rotary Club Aug. 16. I hope to see a lot of you then.

Quotes of the Week

Quote of the Week: "Be open-minded. If you do something right he's going to tell you, he's going to say something to you no matter what, you just got to be coachable. Be ready to be yelled at a lot," DeAaron Fox's advice to UK's incoming freshmen about John Calipari.

Quote of the Week 2: "When I got my first workout in Boston, that's when it kind of became real for me, when I was getting really good positive feedback from them," Derek Willis on when he started believing a NBA contract was possible for him.

Quote of the Week 3: "He's going to be the truth. He's going to be real when he gets older, gets stronger learns new techniques," UK senior offensive lineman Kyle Meadows on freshman linebacker Josh Paschal.



USC transfer E.J. Price greeted fans at UK's Fan Day and said he could tell UK players are happy with how the program is going. (Jeff Houchin Photo)