

# Kentucky Was Kahlil Whitney's "Dream School" Long Before He Had Scholarship Offer



by Larry Vaught

Alonzo Crowder was not surprised when New Jersey five-star wing Kahlil Whitney verbally committed to Kentucky because the star player had not even started high school when he let Crowder know UK was his "dream school" even then.

"I have known Kahlil for the last four years. He played for me coming out of eighth grade," said Crowder. "We really liked him then as a student-athlete and you could see the raw potential in him. We cultivated a relationship starting at that point and his family decided to allow him to come where I was coaching in high school."

Whitney played one season for Crowder at Solorio High School in Chicago and averaged 17.6 point, 3.5 rebounds and 1.8 assists per game before moving to New Jersey to live with his father. He

now plays for Roselle Catholic High School in New Jersey and has already been projected as the No. 3 pick in the 2020 NBA draft by nbadraft.net going into his senior year of high school.

"It didn't catch me off guard when he committed because he's been talking about Kentucky from when I first met him," Crowder said. "It just dialed my memory back to when he told me it was his dream school."

"I told him what I wanted to do was give him more skill sets so that could happen. He is so freakishly athletic. I told him I knew he could be a great player and wanted him to have all the pieces so he could play on the floor like Kevin Durant or Carmelo Anthony."

"I told him if he really wanted to go to Kentucky, he had to put in some serious work and he has been for three years. I wanted to give him some great players to aspire to be like so he would know he had to work extra hard even as a 14-year-old kid."

"When he let me know he had committed, I thought it might possibly be Duke. When he said SEC, I told him I already knew who it was because of his love for Kentucky."

Whitney grew up watching Chicago natives Anthony Davis and Tyler Ulis star for Kentucky. Crowder said when Whitney got to New Jersey he "got to rub shoulders" with former UK standout Michael Kidd-Gilchrist.

"Plus, coach Cal has a great reputation for getting guys to the next step (NBA) and that certainly was attractive to him as well," Crowder said.

Crowder was only a second-year head coach at a non-powerhouse Chicago high school when Whitney opted to play for him rather than a traditional power. The coach said they helped each other build their brands.

"We developed him and got him going and then everybody starting noticing he was going to basically an unknown basketball school," Crowder said. "But that's him. He's a different type of animal. He just wants to be the best. He didn't want to play with other great players he knew. He wanted to compete against those guys."

"Cal said one of Kahlil's most attractive traits was his competitive edge. I knew when he came to play for us he was a different type kid. He's one of those guys that wants to put

the team on his back."

Crowder said Whitney was blessed with big hands, great athleticism and a non-stop motor. The coach said he viewed Whitney like a Bentley, a luxury automobile.

"It takes six months to design a Bentley and put it on the road," Crowder said. "It took four or five months to work on Kahlil's skill sets. He was able to put the ball on the floor, shoot the mid-range shot, hit a 3. I knew he had all the pieces. We just had to polish things and he changed tremendously from his eighth grade year to his freshman season. When he decided to move to New Jersey with his dad, they took the next set of steps to make him even more elite. He's going on his third year there and he's an even better player now."

Crowder said he'll always appreciate the trust Whitney's mother and grandparents had in him and he developed a close relationship with the family.

"I did my best to do right by him and them and make sure he was protected when he was with me," Crowder, who is now the head coach at Crane High School in Chicago, said. "We spent a ton of hours in the gym. We watched games. We went out to eat after workouts. We maintained a connection even when he went to Jersey. I get to see him on the (AAU) circuits. We text and stay in touch. I check in on him to see how things are going."

"I've already told

my wife we have to go down to Kentucky for some games when he gets there. For him to get the chance to play on that big stage is going to be an amazing experience for him and for Kentucky fans to get to see him play."

### Big Impression

Freshman linebacker DeAndre Square has made an impression with his play since arriving on campus in January and says junior linebacker Kash Daniel has been a "great" help for him.

"He has helped me with film, going over the playbook, keeping my head straight, letting me know about practice and how to keep going," Square said. "I would have been lost without him."

He's also learned just by watching senior linebacker Josh Allen, preseason all-SEC selection.

"Coming in (to college) he was not as big just like me. He told me to work and the weight will come," Square said. "It's pretty hard work in the weight room. The eating part is probably the hardest part. I eat a lot but I have a fast metabolism and I am lactose, so it goes away pretty fast. Gaining weight is not easy for me."

### Freshman Commits

Shelby Valley freshman Cassidy Jo Rowe recently gave her verbal commitment to Kentucky, but turns out she's not the only talented basketball player at the school.

Sophomore Cody Potter, a 6-5 junior

guard, became the first player in school history to go over 1,000 points in two years when he scored 1,039 points his first two years and shot 48 percent (341 of 718) from the field and — get this — 43 percent from 3-point range (179 or 417). He's also an 85 percent free throw shooter. He also managed to average 8.1 rebounds per game.

"I think he is the best kept secret in Kentucky," said Shelby Valley coach Jim Hicks. "He is definitely a Division I prospect and I believe he should be a Mr. Basketball contender in 2020."

"He's still got two years I left and I know there are Division I schools where he can play. It just depends on how hard he works as to how high he can go."

### Disconnected Fans

Guy Ramsey, director of strategic communications for UK athletics, knows some Kentucky fans feel disconnected and believe UK no longer cares about the "average" fan based on ticket, parking, donation and other issues.

However, he says Kentucky athletics knows fans are what make UK sports special and that won't change.

"Money does go a long way and is a lot of the reason we can do what we do but it is far from everything when it comes to fans," Ramsey said. "We recognize the best thing we can do for fans is win. The best customer service is to win games no matter where you are sitting."

## The Estill County Tribune

Estill County	Adj. Counties	Kentucky	Out of State
1 year <b>\$16.04</b>	1 year <b>\$26.42</b>	1 year <b>\$30.19</b>	1 year <b>\$32.00</b>
Sales Tax <b>0.96</b>	Sales Tax <b>1.58</b>	Sales Tax <b>1.81</b>	Sales Tax <b>0.00</b>
<b>Total \$17.00</b>	<b>Total \$28.00</b>	<b>Total \$32.00</b>	<b>Total \$32.00</b>

\*\*Seniors, 65 and older, may deduct \$2.50 from above totals

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Send this form with proper payment to:

**The Estill County Tribune**  
**6135 Winchester Road**  
**Irvine, Kentucky 40336-8517**

## Katherine's AUCTION SALE

**630 Main Street - Ravenna, Ky.**  
**Friday, August 31st @ 6:30pm**  
**New, Old, Used, Lots of Furniture,**  
**Lots of Halloween Stuff**  
**Consignments, Packaged Foods**  
**Car Tools, Anything & Everything**  
**LICENSED AUCTION HOUSE**  
**Auctioneers Wade Richardson & Jon Bicknell**  
**Phone (606) 726-9194**  
**Snack Bar on Premises!**

# Job Fair

**Date: August 31**  
**Time: 2 until 5**  
**Where: Estill Co. Board Office Gym**

- McDonald's • Kentucky National Guard
- Rite Aid • Carhartt Inc.
- Estill County Board of Education
- US Postal Service • Adult Learning Center
- Adecco • And so many more!

Sponsored by the  
 Estill County Public Library  
 246 Main Street, Irvine  
 Phone 606-723-3030