

UK Signee Tyrese Maxey Learning How To Play With Target On Him



by Larry Vaught

After Kentucky's loss at Alabama last Saturday, UK coach John Calipari talked about the atmosphere there even though the students were not on campus and Alabama was playing in the national football championship game two days later in California.

It's the type of intensity the Wildcats normally face and UK signee Tyrese Maxey, a 6-5 guard at South Garland High School in Texas, is getting some experience with that sensation this year.

"We have got a tiger on our back in Texas this year," Tyrone Maxey, the player's father and a South Garland assistant coach, said. "We scheduled tough and dropped a few games early that I think helped wake our team up to finding out that nobody was laying down for us."

South Garland is adjusting to losing a 6-9 player just before the season started — but Kentucky usually starts over with team chemistry each year and will again next season.

"It has just taken time to for Tyrese to figure out some things but things are getting better. And we are definitely facing some quality competition because the expectation for us this year is to win a state championship," Tyrone Maxey said.

That's much like the expectation at Kentucky to win a national championship will be next year — or any season.

During three games at the Kentucky Lake Showcase at Marshall County in late December, Maxey put his diverse skills on display. He averaged 22.6 points, 7.6 rebounds, 4.3 assists and 3.0 steals per game in the three wins. He had five 3-pointers in one game — and had six assists the same game. Another game he attempted just three 3-pointers, but pulled off 11 rebounds.

"He has a big target on his back being the top player in the state and getting a lot of recognition like he does

as a Kentucky signee. Everybody wants to measure themselves against him," Tyrone Maxey said. "He has handled it well for the most part. Last year he did not really fly under the radar because he got some attention but there's a lot more attention on him this year after signing with Kentucky. He has had to learn to step it up even another notch with people coming at him."

In some ways, that has included Kentucky fans who have interacted with Tyrese Maxey both on social media and in person.

"Everywhere we went to play in the summer, there would at least be a sprinkling of UK fans if not more," Tyrone Maxey said. "He embraces the idea of interacting with fans. It's a great fan base. There are so many Kentucky fans who have reached out to him in various ways.

"There are so many Kentucky basketball fans anywhere you go. Once he committed, we saw fans everywhere and I imagine we will until he gets to Kentucky ... and then

we were told it will really get crazy."

Tyrese Maxey does not have a "best" strength on the court. He can play either guard spot because of his scoring and passing ability. He's also a tenacious defender because of his length and quickness.

"He just tries to win a basketball game. He does have the ability to score and he can do that, but what people don't realize about him is that he is really competitive on the defensive end," his father, a former SMU assistant coach, said. "He rebounds the ball pretty good for a guard, too. Whatever the game presents and whatever he needs to do to win a game, he will do."

"I consider him a scoring point guard. When he was playing with USA Basketball, he could facilitate when he had a bunch of other guys who could score playing with him. He can be a defensive stopper and guard the other team's best perimeter player. But if I had to pick his best attribute, it would be his scoring."



Tyrese Maxey had some attention focused on him last year — like when he posed for a photo with Abigail Champion in Marshall County — but nothing like what it has been since he signed with Kentucky in November. (Larry Vaught Photo)

Allen Says He Should Be Top Pick



Josh Allen thinks he should be the top pick in the NFL draft and others think it could happen. (Mont Dawson Photo)

Mississippian Loves Kentucky

Callaway (Miss.) sophomore Daeshun Ruffin set a McCracken County Mustang Madness scoring record with 42 points last week in a win over Trinity International and highly regarded junior point guard Daishen Nix.

The 5-10 Ruffin already has four Division I offers, including three — Auburn, Ole Miss, Mississippi State — from the SEC. However, the one he would really like to eventually land is Kentucky and quickly admits he's a fan of Kentucky basketball.

"I like the way they work hard at practice. They never get complacent. You have all

those great players but they all play together as a team," Ruffin said. "Nobody is cocky on that team. Everybody plays together. That's what I like about them. I really have not heard from them in recruiting yet, but it would be a really big deal if I did."

Ruffin and his teammates played in Marshall County Hoop Fest last month before making the trip back to Kentucky last weekend.

"I love it here. Great hospitality and the atmosphere is crazy in Kentucky," he said. "I love Kentucky because the fans here love basketball."

-- Larry Vaught

Green Misses HoF Induction

Blair Green had to miss her induction into the Frank Brittan Academic & Athletic Hall of Fame for Harlan County schools last week because the freshman was busy helping Kentucky beat Vanderbilt in its Southeastern Conference opener.

She was one of seven inducted into the Hall of Fame and certainly had the credentials to back up her induction. She was the first Harlan County athlete to sign a full Division I scholarship and finished her career as the school's all-time leading scorer with 2,375 points and rebounder with 756. She ended her prep career with 3,193 points — 11th

best all-time in Kentucky.

She was an ESPN top 100 player and McDonald's All-American nominee.

Off the court, she excelled also as she was a member of the Beta Club, National Honor Society, Gifted and Talented Leadership, Link Crew, Future Business Leaders of America, Distributive Education Clubs of America, and Spanish Honor Society.

At Kentucky she's played in every game this season and is averaging 6.5 points and 2.4 rebounds per game while shooting 41 percent from the field. She has not miss a free throw in 16 games.

-- Larry Vaught

No Bowl Win Needed To Sign

Ohio defensive lineman Isaiah Gibson didn't need a Citrus Bowl win to make him feel any better about signing with UK in December. He was one of two Ohio defensive linemen that coach Mark Stoops targeted and signed.

The 6-4, 300-pound Gibson got his scholarship offer from UK when he was only a freshman and has unique athleticism for a player his size.

"He probably could have gone to college to play baseball but he stopped playing after his freshman year because he had three (scholarship) offers already for football," his mother, Amy Gibson, said. "He's still playing basketball and it is like hitting a brick wall when a player hits him. It's not his strongest sport but he rebounds like crazy.

"He throws the shot put where he broke the school record last year in his first year throwing. He is an athletic kid. I really have not seen anything he's not good at."

However, Isaiah Gibson has always had one problem when it came to sports.

"No matter what sport he was playing,

he would get off the bus and people would say there was no way he was the age to be playing on that team," Amy Gibson said. "We constantly had to carry his birth certificate with us."

She's never had any problems convincing others, though, about what a special person her oldest son is.

"He's really a gentle giant," his mother said. "He has the biggest heart. He always stands up for others. He's friends with everybody — any race, creed. Doesn't matter who you are, he'll like you."

"The person you see with that smile, that's who he is. But then he puts on that football uniform and something clicks in his head and it's time to go to war for however long the game lasts. Once the game is over, it's done."

"He's just always been that way. Kids are drawn to him. He always wants to play with or entertain them. He will run around and play tag and hide and seek with kids. He'll do whatever kids want him to do to make them happy because he has such a big heart."

-- Larry Vaught



Ohio defensive lineman Isaiah Gibson had the potential to be a college baseball player but opted for football and signed with UK and coach Mark Stoops.

Allen won the

-- Larry Vaught