


WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY IS

READY TO WIN



Rick Stansbury
looking to lead
WKU to victory
in first season
on the Hill

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- 9 Cards aim for postseason return

WESTERN KENTUCKY MEN'S BASKETBALL 2016-17

Stansbury: 'I'm too old to rebuild'

By BRAD STEPHENS
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Rick Stansbury has repeated a series of statements ever since taking the Western Kentucky coaching job in late March.

Stansbury's preached about how his program will be built around defense and rebounding. He's talked about how "it'll take all of us" to get Hilltopper basketball back on the map, and how fans need to get their tickets now, because one day they'll all be sold out. He's said he wants to compete against the best of the best, whether that's in recruiting or scheduling.

But Stansbury's most oft-used mantra may be one he repeated last month during a speech to the Bowling Green Noon Rotary Club.

Stansbury told that crowd, as he's told the media numerous times since taking the job, that he doesn't want the 2016-17 WKU basketball season considered part of a rebuild. He instead wants to win right out of the gates.

"I'm too old to rebuild," Stansbury said. "I didn't come here to rebuild. I'm too old for it. My goals are the same every year, and that's to try to win championships."

Stansbury's vision for championships in his first year certainly raised eyebrows when he took the job after the last two years spent as a Texas A&M assistant.

The Battletown native came to his home state in March and inherited a roster that, at the time, included seven returning scholarship players.

WKU was supposed to have three returning guards in Fredrick Edmond, Marlon Hunter and Chris McNeal. But all three were suspended indefinitely March 17 – the same night the school announced former coach Ray Harper's resignation – and left the school over the following weeks.

Stansbury went about rebuilding his backcourt with graduate transfers. He recruited Washington State's Que Johnson, Providence's Junior Lomomba and Hartford's Pancake Thomas to join his program after they all announced they were leaving their former schools



WESTERN KENTUCKY men's basketball coach Rick Stansbury talks to players Saturday during the Hilltoppers' exhibition win over Kentucky Wesleyan at E.A. Diddle Arena.

for their senior seasons.

"I went from having no guards to having probably the most experienced backcourt in the country, probably, with three fifth-year guys," Stansbury said.

Stansbury added four freshmen – Tobias Howard, Marty Leahy, Damari Parris and Marko Stajkovski – to that backcourt.

Those seven guards join with a frontcourt made up of returning players Willie Carmichael, Justin Johnson, Ben Lawson, Jabari McGhee and Anton Waters.

The other two scholarship forwards from last season that had eligibility remaining, Phabian Glasco and Nathan Smith, are both "medically exempt" from participating with the program this year and aren't on the Hilltopper roster.

Justin Johnson, now a junior,

led the Hilltoppers in both scoring and rebounding one season ago. Lawson and Waters were both role players in Harper's final season.

"Here I am trying to put a team together with basically one player back and that's Johnson," Stansbury said. "... Anton and Big Ben were the only other guys who have played."

Carmichael and McGhee are both set to play for the first time in WKU uniforms after transferring last season from Tennessee. Carmichael is eligible right away, while McGhee must wait until after the fall semester ends before he can play in a game for the Toppers.

Those Hilltoppers will have a road-heavy nonconference schedule highlighted by a Dec. 14 date at Saint Mary's, which was ranked No. 17 in the preseason AP Top

25. Other nonconference games of note for WKU include Nov. 19 at Belmont and Dec. 3 at Missouri and a Nov. 25 matchup with Washington at a tournament in Las Vegas.

Then it'll be on to Conference USA play for the Tops, who were picked third in the league's preseason poll behind top pick UAB and second choice Middle Tennessee.

A mix-and-match roster of incoming veterans, incoming rookies, returners with experience and returners with no experience will take on that slate for WKU.

The future looks bright for the program, with Stansbury and his staff having secured commitments from highly touted Class of 2017 players.

Talented point guard Lamonte

Bearden, a transfer from Buffalo, is also set to take the floor for the Toppers next season after sitting out this one due to NCAA transfer rules.

But Stansbury doesn't want the 2016-17 season to be a bridge to future years. He's set a goal of winning now.

"If anyone had an opportunity to come in here and say, 'Hey, it's going to take us two or three years to get this thing back,' I had that opportunity to do it," Stansbury said. "Again, that's not who I am, that's not what I believe in and that's not what you all want to hear. ..."

"Well I'm telling you, we have a fighter's chance now."

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WESTERN KENTUCKY MEN'S BASKETBALL 2016-17

Grad transfers join forces in Toppers' backcourt

JOHNSON, LOMOMBA, THOMAS HEADLINE PROGRAM'S ALL-NEW GUARD ROTATION

By BRAD STEPHENS
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Three Western Kentucky players are in a unique position this year.

In one respect, Que Johnson, Junior Lomomba and Pancake Thomas are the new faces at WKU. They've all joined the program in recent months and have yet to play their first regular-season games for the Hilltoppers.

On the other hand, those three guards have been asked to be some of the main leaders for a WKU team that returns only three players who saw game action last year for the Toppers.

Johnson, Lomomba and Thomas would each be additional pieces to most teams. But on this one, they're helping form the foundation.

"We all sacrificed something by coming here for our fifth year," Lomomba said. "We came with a common goal of winning. I think that brought us closer and that helps us bond even better."

Johnson, Lomomba and Thomas all transferred to WKU from Washington State, Providence and Hartford, respectively. As graduate students, the three are eligible to play right away rather than sitting out the NCAA-mandated season required of regular transfers.

That rule has proved a blessing this season for WKU and new coach Rick Stansbury. He inherited a roster that included zero scholarship guards who returned from former coach Ray Harper's final Hilltopper team in 2015-16.

By adding Johnson, Lomomba and Thomas, WKU has gone from having no backcourt to having one of the nation's most experienced groups of guards.

"We bring that experience together on the court at the same time," Johnson said. "Junior, he's won where he's been, and Pancake, he brings leadership and experience. ... I guess we feed off each other even though we haven't played in a game."

Johnson and Lomomba were the first two grad transfers to join the fold for WKU.

The Pontiac, Mich., native Johnson played in 93 games with 42 starts over three seasons at Washington State. The 6-foot-6, 205-pound guard averaged 11.3 points and 2.5 rebounds per game as a junior last season. He 40.9 percent from 3-point range and 75.9 percent from the free-throw line.



PANCAKE THOMAS (from left), Junior Lomomba and Que Johnson sit Oct. 25 at E.A. Diddle Arena. Johnson, Lomomba and Thomas all transferred to WKU from Washington State, Providence and Hartford, respectively. As graduate students, the three are eligible to play right away rather than sitting out the NCAA-mandated season required of regular transfers.

Johnson was a productive player on a Cougars team that stumbled to a 9-22 record. He left the Pacific 12 Conference school in Pullman, Wash., looking for a "fresh start" in his senior season.

Stansbury was a primary reason Johnson chose WKU as his senior-year destination, he said.

"I never played the role of a leader at Washington State so it's a new role for me trying to be a leader vocally and setting an example as one of the oldest people on the team," Johnson said. "So I try to think about that day in and day out. Coach Stansbury, he also reminds me to be a leader on and off the court."

While Johnson toiled away last year on a struggling Washington State team, Lomomba was a starter on an NCAA Tournament team at Providence.

The Montreal native Lomomba started 34 of 36 games last season for the Friars, helping them to the second round of the NCAA Tournament. He was a role player for Providence known more for his defense (32 steals) than offense (5.3 points per game).

But Lomomba said he wanted a new challenge for his senior year. After a

career spent playing on the wing, he wanted to switch to point guard, and Stansbury and WKU offered him that opportunity.

"Obviously, I want to make it to the pros," the 6-5, 205-pound Lomomba said. "For me personally, in order to make it to the pros I would have to change something in my game."

"A transition to the point guard position is the best thing for me to do in order to transition myself into my future."

The additions of Johnson and Lomomba, both of whom committed in May and arrived in July, gave WKU a shooter and a new point guard. But Stansbury wasn't done putting together his new backcourt.

Thomas came on to the transfer market in August when he announced he was leaving Hartford. He'd been an all-conference player with the Hawks, leading the team with 18.9 points, 6.4 rebounds, and 2.8 assists.

But like Johnson, Thomas was a standout player on a bad team. Hartford went 10-23 overall and 4-12 in the America East Conference.

Thomas, who began his career with two seasons at New Mexico, took his first official visit this fall to WKU. The 6-4, 195-

pound guard then visited a handful of other programs before coming back around and committing to the Hilltoppers.

"I was looking for somewhere where I could come in and play my game but also have a shot at making it to the NCAA Tournament," the Baton Rouge, La., native Thomas said. "When I saw these guys and what they had with other players from last year, I thought they'd have a shot."

Johnson, Lomomba and Thomas each started WKU's two exhibition wins last week against Campbellsville and Kentucky Wesleyan.

Thomas made a splash in the 103-97 victory Saturday against KWC, hitting a fallaway, buzzer-beating 3-pointer to send the game to double overtime.

He, Johnson and Lomomba combined to score 67 points that night, saving the Toppers from an exhibition defeat against the Division II Panthers.

Based on Stansbury's playing time patterns in the two exhibitions, Johnson, Lomomba and Thomas form half of a top-six rotation for WKU that also includes returning forwards Willie Carmichael, Justin Johnson and Ben Lawson.

WKU
HILLTOPPERS
2016-17 ROSTER

00	McGhee, Jabari	6-7	F So.
1	Howard, Tobias	6-2	G Fr.
3	Parris, Damari	6-0	G Fr.
5	Lomomba, Junior	6-5	G Gr.
12	Thomas, Pancake	6-4	G Gr.
14	Lawson, Ben	7-1	F Sr.
15	Miller, Tyler	6-4	G Jr.
21	Stajkovski, Marko	6-7	G Fr.
23	Johnson, Justin	6-7	F Jr.
24	Carmichael, Willie	6-8	F So.
32	Johnson, Que	6-6	G Gr.
42	Walters, Anton	6-7	F Sr.
43	Leahy, Marty	6-5	G Fr.

2016-17 SCHEDULE

11/12	vs. Alabama St.	7 p.m.
11/16	vs. Jacksonville St.	8 p.m.
11/19	at Belmont	7 p.m.
11/22	vs. N.C. A&T	7 p.m.
11/25	vs. Washington S	7 p.m.
11/26	TBAS	TBA
11/30	at Eastern Kentucky	7 p.m.
12/03	at Missouri	2 p.m.
12/11	at Indiana St.	3:30 p.m.
12/14	at Saint Mary's	9 p.m.
12/17	at Detroit Mercy	1 p.m.
12/21	vs. Ohio U.	8 p.m.
12/28	vs. Austin Peay	7 p.m.
12/31	at Florida Atlantic	Noon
1/2	at Florida International	6 p.m.
1/5	vs. Charlotte	7 p.m.
1/7	vs. Old Dominion	5 p.m.
1/12	at UAB	7 p.m.
1/14	at Middle Tennessee	7 p.m.
1/21	at Marshall	5 p.m.
1/26	vs. UTEP	7 p.m.
1/28	vs. UTSA	3 p.m.
2/2	at Louisiana Tech	7 p.m.
2/4	at Southern Miss	4 p.m.
2/11	vs. Marshall	5 p.m.
2/16	vs. Middle Tennessee	8 p.m.
2/19	vs. UAB	1 p.m.
2/23	at Charlotte	6 p.m.
2/25	at Old Dominion	6 p.m.
3/2	vs. North Texas	7 p.m.
3/4	vs. Rice	7 p.m.
Conference USA Tournament March 8-11, Birmingham, Ala.		
\$-Las Vegas		

Having so many new players carry so much of the load for their new team is a unique situation, but Thomas said he and his fellow grad transfers are embracing the challenge.

"Being with two other fifth-year seniors, that's a lot of experience," Thomas said. "If we all have the same goal, then it'll all work out."

— Follow sports reporter Brad Stephens on Twitter @BradBGDN or visit bgdailynews.com.

"We bring that experience together on the court at the same time. Junior, he's won where he's been, and Pancake, he brings leadership and experience. ... I guess we feed off each other even though we haven't played in a game."

Que Johnson

WKU graduate senior guard,
on fellow grad transfer guards Junior Lomomba and Pancake ThomasWishing the
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WESTERN KENTUCKY WOMEN'S BASKETBALL 2016-17

Brown's inside presence still an evolving strength

By ELLIOTT PRATT
epratt@bgdailynews.com

Michelle Clark-Heard is quick to point out that the Western Kentucky women's basketball team's WNIT postseason run last season wouldn't have happened without a breakout sophomore year from Ivy Brown.

The Lady Toppers' coach saw tremendous growth in Brown then and sees it continuing into her junior campaign.

Brown started all 34 games last year as WKU's mainstay in the post. The 6-foot-1 forward from Hodgenville provided a consistent presence down low for a team that thinned out to eight active players by season's end.

With the Lady Toppers' lack of size, Heard needed Brown to become a reliable rebounder.

Brown responded to the challenge by leading WKU with 8.6 rebounds per game. The same expectations hold true again this season.

"She's grown tremendously," Heard said. "I think the most important thing she's done is do whatever the coaching staff asks her to do. I think that's a big reason we were so successful last year because she just decided that she was going to be a great rebounder."

The former Miss Kentucky Basketball from LaRue County High School also scored consistently as a secondary objective to bringing in rebounds. She was the team's third-leading scorer at 11.5 points per game and led WKU with 10 double-doubles to become just the 15th player in the program to record 10 or more in a single season.

Brown was the leading rebounder in 18 games last year and recorded a season-high 14 boards on three occasions.

This season's outlook has Brown in that exact same role with another roster lacking in size.

"I'm just doing what the team needs me to do," Brown said. "We're small again, so rebounding has been one of my main focuses and that's what I want to do every night is focus on rebounding and running the floor."

During her freshman year, Brown was able to back up former



WESTERN KENTUCKY forward Ivy Brown (right) shoots March 17 while guarded by Dayton forward Maddy Dennis during WKU's 89-72 win in the first round of the WNIT at E.A. Diddle Arena. AUSTIN ANTHONY/photo@bgdailynews.com

Lady Topper Chastity Gooch while learning the ways of maneuvering in the paint as an undersized forward.

At 6 feet, Gooch earned the C-USA Player of the Year honor while finishing fourth in career scoring and third in career rebounds.

Brown and Gooch are similar in their ability to make perimeter shots. Brown showed solid improvement in that category last year, too. She went from attempt-

ing 65 3-point shot attempts her freshman year to just 69 as a sophomore but increased her success rate from 18 percent to 36 percent.

She also increased her field-goal percentage from 29 to 48 percent while shooting more than twice as many attempts.

She scored a career-high 26 points in February against Marshall while becoming the second player in WKU history to hit five 3-pointers without missing.

What makes those numbers pop

out is that Brown wasn't a traditional back-to-the-basket forward coming into WKU. A bit of coaching and watching Gooch play the position allowed Brown to expand her role.

"It was hard at first, but I've learned to like it," Brown said. "I'd much rather be in the post now. (Assistant coach Greg) Collins and coach Heard have both worked with me on different things, so I've really enjoyed it."

Brown can still be a face-up for-

ward if needed, Heard said, and it shows the flexibility and intelligence Brown has added to her skill set.

"It makes her a great player because great players will do what they're asked to do to make the team successful," Heard said. "I love coaching Ivy. She works on her game and her IQ is very high. That really helps this team."

— Follow sports reporter Elliott Pratt on Twitter @EPrattBGDN or visit bgdailynews.com.

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WESTERN KENTUCKY WOMEN'S BASKETBALL 2016-17

Jones, Noble help return Lady Tops to prominence

By ELLIOTT PRATT
epratt@bgdailynews.com

Kendall Noble and Micah Jones walked into hard times when they committed to the Western Kentucky women's basketball program.

The Lady Toppers had just finished 9-21 following the 2011-12 season, marking a new record for most losses in a season and the fewest wins in over 30 years.

A 15-17 mark the year before signaled the beginning of back-to-back losing seasons for the first time since 1974-75. That downfall brought the end of a 10-year head coaching run for former player and coach Mary Taylor Cowles, who was fired in March 2012.

Jones had already signed early in the fall of 2011 out of Green County High School and Noble had been a big target on WKU's radar out of Perry County Central.

But their commitments never wavered and WKU was ready to turn its program around.

Said then-athletic director Ross Bjork after announcing Cowles' firing: "We have to compete for and win championships, and we must provide a great home-court atmosphere for our student-athletes. ... It's a must that we get our program back to the level that we all expect and restore the confidence on the court and in the community."

Fast forward four years later. Jones and Noble are entering their final seasons as a part of the biggest turnaround in program history.

The two redshirt seniors have played vital roles in the rapid rise of Lady Topper basketball under coach Michelle Clark-Heard. WKU is 103-32 in four years with Heard at the helm with two conference tournament championships and two NCAA Tournament berths.

"For me, it's kind of a sad feeling because that will be a group that will leave out

WKU
LADY TOPPERS
2016-17 ROSTER

1	Mayes, Naomi	5-6	G So.
3	Bopp, Sidnee	5-6	G So.
4	Givens, Dee	6-1	F So.
5	Jones, Micah	5-8	G Sr.
10	Brown, Tashia	6-1	F Jr.
12	Noble, Kendall	5-11	G Sr.
13	Frank, Malaka	5-10	G Fr.
15	Creech, Whitney	5-8	G Fr.
20	Akpan, Ima	5-10	G Sr.
21	Price, Sarah	6-2	F Fr.
23	Brown, Ivy	6-1	F Jr.
24	Coe, Jaycee	5-11	G So.
25	Goodin-Rogers, K.	6-2	F Jr.
32	Smith, Kayla	5-11	G So.

Head coach: Michelle Clark-Heard

2016-17 SCHEDULE

11/12	vs. Alabama A&M	7 p.m.
11/16	vs. UT Arlington	5:30 p.m.
11/19	vs. Indiana	2 p.m.
11/25	vs. DePaulS	12:30 p.m.
11/26	TBAS	TBA
11/27	TBAS	TBA
11/30	at E. Kentucky	4:30 p.m.
12/3	at Austin Peay	Noon
12/11	at Louisville	1 p.m.
12/15	vs. Lipscomb	7 p.m.
12/18	vs. Coll. of Charleston	2 p.m.
12/21	vs. Ball St.	5:30 p.m.
12/30	vs. Florida Atlantic	7 p.m.
1/1	vs. Fla. International	2 p.m.
1/5	at Charlotte	10:30 a.m.
1/7	at Old Dominion	3 p.m.
1/12	vs. UAB	11 a.m.
1/15	vs. MTSU	2 p.m.
1/21	vs. Marshall	2 p.m.
1/26	at UTEP	8:05 p.m.
1/28	at UTSA	2 p.m.
2/2	vs. Louisiana Tech	7 p.m.
2/4	vs. Southern Miss	2 p.m.
2/11	at Marshall	Noon
2/16	at MTSU	6:30 p.m.
2/18	at UAB	2 p.m.
2/23	vs. Charlotte	7 p.m.
2/25	vs. Old Dominion	2 p.m.
3/2	at North Texas	7 p.m.
3/4	at Rice	2 p.m.

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WESTERN KENTUCKY guards Kendall Noble (left) and Micah Jones talk Oct. 14 before a scrimmage during Hilltopper Hysteria at E.A. Diddle Arena. AUSTIN ANTHONY/photo@bgdailynews.com

that was here when we first got here as a staff," Heard said at a news conference in October. "I'm really proud of them both because they have definitely handled a lot of adversity through their careers. Every single day, they do everything they can to try to help this team get better. They're a joy to coach. I'm very lucky."

Jones and Noble begin their last year leading a squad coming off its deepest postseason tournament run since 2007 with its appearance in the WNIT quarterfinals last year and a 27-7

See **DUO**, PAGE 10

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KENTUCKY MEN'S BASKETBALL 2016-17

Talented Wildcats have high expectations

By GARY B. GRAVES
The Associated Press

LEXINGTON — Kentucky coach John Calipari once again must figure out how to use his latest talented freshman class, which this year is big and fills voids at many positions. All of which means another season of high expectations at a school where a national championship is always the standard.

After finishing 27-9 and losing in the NCAA Tournament's round of 32 last spring, Kentucky appears capable of contending for a ninth NCAA title. This despite losing six players including several regulars such as Associated Press All-American guards Tyler Ulis and Jamal Murray, who combined to average 37 points per game last season, and 6-foot-11 Skal Labissiere.

Kentucky landed guards De'Aaron Fox and Malik Monk, both 6-foot-3 high school All-Americans who join sophomore Isaiah Briscoe (9.9 points, 5.3 rebounds per game) in the backcourt. All can handle the ball and shoot, giving Calipari some options, compared with last year's squad run by Ulis.

"This team will probably have three guys having the ball, and we'll play off them," Calipari said. "One may have it more, but the other two are going to have it a significant amount of time. So that makes it different."

But this recruiting class is all about the bigs with the additions of Edrice "Bam" Adebayo and Sacha Killeya-Jones — a pair of 6-foot-10 All-Americans — and 6-9 Wenyen Gabriel.

Adebayo has an NBA body and is fierce around the basket on both ends of the floor. Killeya-Jones and Gabriel are long and guard the rim as well.

The Wildcats also return



JAMES CRISP/AP

KENTUCKY'S DE'AARON Fox goes up for a dunk Sunday during the second half of an exhibition game against Asbury in Lexington. Fox is one of five of the nation's top 24 prospects, according to composite rankings of recruiting websites compiled by 247Sports. The new Wildcats include Fox, Malik Monk, Bam Adebayo, Wenyen Gabriel and Sacha Killeya-Jones.

size with 7-footer Isaac Humphries and 6-10 redshirt freshman Tai Wynyard, giving Kentucky its tallest frontcourt since the 38-1 team that reached the Final Four two years ago. Nobody's making that grand comparison yet as the team works to form chemistry.

"We all want the same dream, so we just try to accomplish it together," Monk said. "It's easy to sacrifice if you have great players around you."

Other things to watch in Kentucky this season:

MATURE BRISCOE

Isaiah Briscoe worked out

with NBA teams last spring to gauge his pro prospects before returning for his sophomore season. He's more seasoned by the experience, and more muscular. The biggest benefits might be his improved shooting — which Kentucky needs from him after an inconsistent freshman season — and his eagerness to lead. "It forced me to grow up," Briscoe said of the process. "Being one of the few guys to come back (under Calipari), I'll be able to lead these guys."

BLUEGRASS GRAYBEARDS

Kentucky has seniors for the second straight season,

both of whom could play bigger roles. Forward Derek Willis is working to add defense to his game after averaging career bests of 7.7 points and 4.4 rebounds last season and becoming part of the rotation. Guard Dominique Hawkins just aims to stay healthy after his junior year was limited by injuries. He's a physical defensive specialist being encouraged to shoot more this season.

COACH'S KID

If things get loud in Rupp near the end of a Kentucky rout, it might be fans clamoring for Calipari to put his

son, Brad, on the floor. The 6-foot freshman is a walk-on with an eye toward coaching one day but figures to become a fan favorite for obvious reasons.

RENOVATED RUPP

The Wildcats' home begins its 40th anniversary season with a new floor and center-hung scoreboard and video screen that has replaced the "Big Bertha" bank of loudspeakers, which resembled an oversized pine cone. The arena has already added high-definition video boards in the corners and other electronic features to enhance the game

KENTUCKY WILDCATS

2016-17 ROSTER

0	Fox, DeAaron	6-3	G Fr.
1	Killeya-Jones, S.	6-10	F Fr.
3	Adebayo, Edrice	6-10	F Fr.
5	Monk, Malik	6-3	G Fr.
10	David, Jonny	6-2	G So.
11	Mulder, Mychal	6-4	G Sr.
13	Briscoe, Isaiah	6-3	G So.
14	Wynyard, Tai	6-10	F Fr.
15	Humphries, Isaac	7-0	F So.
20	Calipari, Brad	6-0	G Fr.
25	Hawkins, Dom.	6-0	G Sr.
30	Pulliam, Dillon	6-3	G So.
32	Gabriel, Wenyen	6-9	F Fr.
35	Willis, Derek	6-9	F Sr.

Head coach: John Calipari

2016-17 SCHEDULE

11/11	vs. Stephen F. Austin	6 p.m.
11/13	vs. Canisius	5 p.m.
11/15	vs. Michigan St.\$	6 p.m.
11/20	vs. Duquesne	8 p.m.
11/23	vs. Cleveland St.	Noon
11/25	vs. UT Martin	6 p.m.
11/28	vs. Arizona St.%	6 p.m.
12/3	vs. UCLA	11:30 a.m.
12/7	vs. Valparaiso	7 p.m.
12/11	vs. Hofstra^	2 p.m.
12/17	vs. North Carolina*	4:45 p.m.
12/21	at Louisville	6 p.m.
12/29	at Ole Miss	6 p.m.
1/3	vs. Texas A&M	8 p.m.
1/7	vs. Arkansas	7:30 p.m.
1/10	at Vanderbilt	6 p.m.
1/14	vs. Auburn	3 p.m.
1/17	at Mississippi St.	6 p.m.
1/21	vs. South Carolina	TBA
1/24	at Tennessee	8 p.m.
1/28	vs. Kansas	5 p.m.
1/31	vs. Georgia	8 p.m.
2/4	at Florida	TBA
2/7	vs. LSU	6 p.m.
2/11	at Alabama	Noon
2/14	vs. Tennessee	6 p.m.
2/18	at Georgia	TBA
2/21	at Missouri	8 p.m.
2/25	vs. Florida	1 p.m.
2/28	vs. Vanderbilt	8 p.m.
3/4	at Texas A&M	11 a.m.

SEC Tournament
March 8-12, Nashville
\$-New York
%-Bahamas
^-Brooklyn
*-Las Vegas

experience.

KEY GAMES

Kentucky's always-tough nonconference schedule includes matchups against Michigan State on Nov. 15 in the Champions Classic; a home game against UCLA (Dec. 3); consecutive contests against North Carolina (Dec. 17) and at archrival Louisville (Dec. 21); and a Jan. 28 home game against Kansas in the SEC/Big 12 Challenge.

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LOUISVILLE MEN'S BASKETBALL 2016-17

Cards aim for postseason after 1-year ban

By GARY B. GRAVES
The Associated Press

LOUISVILLE — Louisville is eager to play in the postseason again after sitting out last spring, and the Cardinals hope to make it a long stay once they get there.

Though the escort scandal that resulted in a self-imposed postseason ban and other penalties last season is still not resolved, coach Rick Pitino long ago shifted focus toward getting the Cardinals back into this year's NCAA Tournament.

The NCAA last week accused the program of committing four Level 1 violations and the governing body criticized Pitino for failing to monitor former Cardinals staffer Andre McGee, who the NCAA says provided improper benefits to recruits and players by hiring strippers.

The case now proceeds to a spring resolution.

For his part, Pitino is more than happy to talk hoops. And on the court, he believes if the Cardinals execute his trademark man-to-man defense, a deep tournament run is possible.

"It isn't a new style," Pitino said of his philosophy, "it's just that we've confused a lot of people with our defense and playing our matchup zone."

"We have probably scrapped that and are playing 95 percent man-to-man. ... The tempo is much more up-tempo, even though we have always been an up-tempo team."

Louisville's initial challenge is finding offense with the departures of leading scorers Damion Lee and Trey Lewis, graduate transfers who combined to average more than 27 points per game last season for a team that finished 23-8. The Cardinals also lost 6-foot-11 post player Chinanu Onuaku, who averaged 9.9



TIMOTHY D. EASLEY/AP

LOUISVILLE MEN'S basketball coach Rick Pitino argues a call with a game official Nov. 3 during an exhibition game against Kentucky Wesleyan in Louisville.

points and 8.5 rebounds per contest.

On the bright side, Pitino believes many players have scoring potential with several poised to take charge.

Junior guard Quentin Snider is the Cardinals' top returning scorer and playmaker (9.4 points, 3.5 assists), but the question might be whether sophomore guard Donovan Mitchell or second-year wing Deng Adel — or both — have breakout seasons.

Mitchell, who became known last season for a series of high-flying dunks, is focused on improving his perimeter game. Adel is able

to score from all over the floor and eagerly looks forward to creating easy chances by pressing ball handlers.

The Cardinals believe if they succeed on defense, scoring opportunities will come naturally.

Said Adel, "With our playing style of pressing and focusing on turning teams over, we all have the chance to get points."

Some other things to look for in Louisville's season:

LEANER, QUICKER

Mitchell has dropped 18 pounds and weighs around 195, while junior forward Jaylen Johnson has shed

weight that Pitino believes was slowing him down. Both players appear faster and more agile and are eager to see what opportunities arise from being lighter. "I don't get tired as easily and feel more energetic," Mitchell said. "It might seem small, but that makes a big difference playing in this up-and-down system."

MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

Onuaku's departure for the NBA draft caught Pitino off guard, and filling the void he left in the pivot could be a concern. Junior 7-footers Anas Mahmoud and Matz Stockman continue to devel-

op but must step up their games to man the inside until 6-10 senior Mangok Mathiang returns from a foot injury.

MORE TRANSFERS

Last season's success with graduate transfers Lewis and Lee led Louisville to choose that route again. This year's "one-and-done" is 6-1 guard Tony Hicks, who averaged 12.8 points, 2.9 rebounds and 2.5 assists per game over three years at Pennsylvania. The Cardinals also added 6-5 sophomore Dwayne Sutton, who averaged 12 points per contest last season at UNC Asheville.

LOUISVILLE CARDINALS
2016-17 ROSTER

0	King, V.J.	6-6	F Fr.
1	Hicks, Tony	6-1	G Gr.
4	Snider, Quentin	6-2	G Jr.
5	Stockman, Matz	7-0	C Jr.
10	Johnson, Jalen	6-9	F Jr.
11	Henderson, Jay	6-4	G So.
12	Mathiang, Mangok	6-10	F Sr.
13	Spalding, Ray	6-10	F So.
14	Mahmoud, Anas	7-0	F Jr.
15	Sharpe, Tyler	6-1	G Fr.
22	Adel, Deng	6-7	F So.
23	Levitich, David	6-3	G Sr.
24	Sutton, Dwayne	6-5	F So.
30	McMahon, Ryan	6-0	G Fr.
45	Mitchell, Donovan	6-3	G So.

Head coach: Rick Pitino

2016-17 SCHEDULE

11/11	vs. Evansville	6 p.m.
11/14	vs. William & Mary	6 p.m.
11/17	vs. Long Beach St.	3 p.m.
11/23	vs. Old Dominion#	8:30 p.m.
11/24	vs. TBA#	TBA
11/25	vs. TBA#	TBA
11/30	vs. Purdue	6 p.m.
12/3	at Grand Canyon	8 p.m.
12/7	vs. Southern Illinois	6 p.m.
12/10	vs. Texas Southern	1 p.m.
12/17	vs. Eastern Kentucky	11 a.m.
12/21	vs. Kentucky	6 p.m.
12/28	vs. Virginia	TBA
12/31	vs. Indiana%	11:30 a.m.
1/4	at Notre Dame	8 p.m.
1/7	at Georgia Tech	1 p.m.
1/11	vs. Pittsburgh	6 p.m.
1/14	vs. Duke	11 a.m.
1/19	vs. Clemson	8 p.m.
1/21	at Florida State	1 p.m.
1/24	at Pittsburgh	6 p.m.
1/29	vs. N.C. State	Noon
2/4	at Boston College	2 p.m.
2/6	at Virginia	6 p.m.
2/11	vs. Miami	TBA
2/13	at Syracuse	6 p.m.
2/18	vs. Virginia Tech	Noon
2/22	at North Carolina	8 p.m.
2/26	vs. Syracuse	1 p.m.
3/1	at Wake Forest	8 p.m.
3/4	vs. Notre Dame	1 p.m.

ACC Tournament
March 7-11, Brooklyn
#-Bahamas
%-Indianapolis

He will sit out this season per NCAA transfer rules but has three seasons of eligibility remaining.

KEY GAMES

The Cardinals' nonconference schedule presents plenty of challenges in preparation for the tough ACC docket. Besides their annual Bluegrass showdown against rival Kentucky (Dec. 21), they face Purdue in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge (Nov. 30) and Indiana on New Year's Eve in Indianapolis.

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From Page 5
DUO

final record.
That success has garnered attention of the league's coaches to vote WKU as the preseason favorite to win Conference USA, the first time the Lady Toppers have attained a No. 1 preseason conference ranking in four years under Heard.
Noble, the defending C-USA Player and Defensive Player of the year, is tabbed to win the honor again.

"(Coach Heard) keeps saying we have a target on our back and it's true, everyone is gunning for us," Noble said. "We're just trying to come to practice every single day and live up to the expectations."

WKU won the Sun Belt Conference Tournament title in Heard's second season and the C-USA title in the school's first year in the league two seasons ago.

Over the last two seasons, WKU's 57 victories are the second-most in a two-year span in program history.

"It's been a great ride, honestly," Jones told the Daily News this week. "Definitely a roller coaster. There's been a lot of ups and downs. Coach Heard and all the assistants know what they're doing. They put us in a position to be successful. We've had good seasons every year, but to know that we're at the top now and know we're expected to win another championship, or be in the running for it, is a good spot to be in."

Through all the successes and consistency WKU has built, Jones and Noble have had their share of individual highs and lows.

Noble missed the first seven games of her freshman season with a quadriceps injury. She returned to play two games before tearing her anterior cruciate ligament in her right knee.

Meanwhile, Jones was thrust into the starting point guard duties that same season due to lack of depth. Jones stepped in to hand out 68 assists while starting 32 of the 33 games.

During this time, Noble was working on her comeback with her second ACL tear of her career and received a medical redshirt.

"But the great thing is that I'll have her for four more years, and we'll get the opportunity for everyone to see how special she is," said Heard in 2012 at the time Noble was injured.

Noble bounced back to average 11, 10.9 and a team-high 18.1



BAC TOTRONG/photo@bgdailynews.com

WESTERN KENTUCKY'S Kendall Noble (left) breaks a double-team of Tennessee Martin's Shy Copney (center) and Katie Schubert on March 21 during the Lady Toppers' 64-57 win in the second round of the WNIT at E.A. Diddle Arena.

points per game over the next three years, respectively.

She earned the 2014 Sun Belt Conference Freshman of the Year honor, the 2015 and 2016 C-USA Defensive Player of the Year award while making the All-Conference Team the last three seasons.

She recorded WKU's first two triple-doubles last season.

While the Hazard native filled the stat sheets in a record season, Jones saw her senior year take an abrupt turn.

After starting every game her sophomore and junior year as WKU's point guard, Jones sustained a season-ending left ACL tear in the second game of the year against Louisville on Nov. 21.

Just like Noble, it was the second ACL tear for Jones' career

after suffering the same injury to her right knee as a junior at Green County.

Bouncing back from that level of injury was much tougher to deal with late in her career, Jones said.

"It was tough," Jones said. "I didn't know really what I was going to do. I had already gotten accepted into (physical therapy) school and I was up in the air, but I wasn't ready to give basketball up."

"It was just not knowing if you're ever going to be the same or if you're going to be back to what you were. The first couple of practices, I thought I would be out there and be fine, but I got out there and it was totally different."

The trusted relationship between Jones and Heard helped the former and her recovery process after

many conversations with the coach. Sitting on the bench between assistant coaches for a year also gave the Greensburg native a new perspective as a leader.

"They were very heart-to-heart," Jones said of the conversations with Heard. "She could be honest and say, 'You do have a long way to go.' But she had faith that I would get there ... I learned how important it was that we need a leader on the team. I may not be the most athletic any more, but I do know we need somebody that can talk. That's what coach Heard is looking for me to do as a point guard."

Heard commended Jones' leadership in the team's exhibition against Young Harris last week, saying Jones "really stepped up" that night.

Known for her quiet personality, Noble took just one shot and dished out three assists, brought in three rebounds and had two steals.

The two redshirt senior contributions will come on a team touting depth unlike any other team they've been a part of. WKU graduated just one senior last year, welcomes three transfers and three freshmen who can contribute immediately.

It's a much different landscape than when Noble, Jones and Heard arrived at WKU four years ago.

"It's changed so much," Noble said. "Coach Heard says to leave a place better than you found it and I think we've done that ... We've come a very long way."

— Follow sports reporter Elliott Pratt on Twitter @EPrattBGDN or visit bgdailynews.com.

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