

UK signee Daimion Collins elite as rim protector



Vaught's Views
Larry Vaught

John Calipari's current 2021 recruiting class might not have that instant superstar but recruiting analysts certainly like the upside for 6-9 Daimion Collins of Atlanta, Texas.

"Collins is elite on



Recruiting analyst Krysten Peek believes signee Daimion Collins is "going to be fun for Kentucky fans to watch."

both ends on the floor in two specific areas. First and foremost as a rim protector and second as a finisher," said Paul Biancardi, national recruiting director for ESPN. "His hands are excellent to catch lobbs, finish drop off passes in the dunk spot with a quick burst. His face up jumper and jump hook has demonstrated rapid progress.

"His physical tools, mobility and developing skill make him an exciting prospect with a huge upside. He is close to 6-10 with a 7-4 wingspan. He impacts the game without scoring which is a rarity. When his offensive game blossoms and becomes consistent, you're looking at the future high lottery pick down the road."

He averaged 24.6 points, 13.7 rebounds and 7.7 blocks per game as a junior at Atlanta High School and was a Third Team All-State selection by the Texas Association of Basketball Coaches. Collins is a five-star recruit ranked as the No. 10 overall player in the 2021 class by Rivals. He's ranked 19th by 247 Sports and 24th by ESPN even though Biancardi expects that ranking to rise.

Krysten Peek, basketball writer for Rivals and Yahoo, got to see Collins play recently at the Pangos All-American Camp in Chandler, Ariz., where he made the all-tournament team along with point guard Nolan Hickman, another UK signee.

"He is super athletic and can obviously jump better than anybody in the gym," Peek said. "If a defender misses a box out he is not only rebounding the ball but dunking it every single time. He's going to be fun for Kentucky fans to watch."

Peek says Collins is not the shot blocker that 7-footer Chet Holmgren, one of the elite players in the 2021 class, is but he's still special defensively.

"His timing needs to get better, but he definitely is a great rim protector," Peek said. "I don't think he is too thin but he has room to add muscle mass and weight. He has been working on getting stronger and he understands the SEC has a lot of stronger, bigger

bodies that he needs to compete against."

Kentucky coach John Calipari called Collins an "incredible young man" and Peek agrees.

"He is just a really, really nice kid," she said. "Very soft spoken and a hard worker. He is excited to be playing at Kentucky."

Peek believes his offensive game might be better than some realize.

"He has got great instincts in the pick-and-roll and pick-and-pop," Peek said. "His game does not extend to the 3 (point line) yet but his midrange game is good. He has a high release on his jump shot to go with his size."

Kentucky assistant coach Joel Justus says his shot blocking and rebounding are his biggest assets but like Peek believes his offensive game is solid and will get better.

"He is a guy that has gone from being able to score around the basket to scoring off the top of the key. He has good ball skills and is going to be a guy that I think when he shows up here we are going to see a better player than we have seen to this point," Justus said.

"He is a guy that continues to get better on both ends of the floor. We look for guys that are hungry and driven. Daimion is that guy."

The passing of Kentucky offensive line coach John Schlarman last week at age 45 after his two-plus year battle with cancer left coach Mark Stoops "heart broken" and looking for ways to express not only his affection for Schlarman but also what an inspiration he had been to everyone.

Schlarman, a former all-SEC offensive lineman at UK, had a way of relating to anyone he met.

"It was just his personality. It's hard not to like John," Stoops said. "He goes about things the right way. I think everybody can respect that. The outpouring of support for John was amazing."

Former UK teammates and then players Schlarman has coached posted numerous comments on social media with their love and support for Schlarman. One message really touched Stoops. It came from Jedrick Wills, a former Lafayette High School teammate of senior UK tackle Landon Young. Kentucky made Wills a priority recruit but he went to Alabama and then was the 10th overall pick by Cleveland in the 2020 draft.

"It really meant a lot to me that a guy like Jedrick Wills reached out to me and was touched by John and just wanted to pass on his condolences," Stoops said. "That kind of sums up what you are asking (about Schlarman's ability to relate to everyone). He is just a likable man. A good football coach but an even better person. He's a great human being."

Stoops said he was thankful West Virginia head coach Neal Brown, his first offensive coordinator at UK, recommended Schlarman for the offensive line coaching position. Schlarman and recruiting coordinator Vince Marrow are the only two coaches who have been with Stoops every year at Kentucky.

"When you meet somebody like John, how can you not love him," Stoops said. "We hit it off immediately. He inspired all of us."

That was obvious at Kroger Field last week when UK beat Vanderbilt 38-35. Schlarman was honored in various ways before and during the game and Young cried when talking about what a "blessing" it was to have played for Schlarman.

Blue Ribbon College Basketball Yearbook publisher Chris Dortch doesn't deny that his publication has Kentucky too low in the preseason rankings.

Coach John Calipari's team is ranked 13th. But Dortch and his staff had to make their rankings before they knew if Wake Forest transfer Olivier Sarr would be eligible to play for UK or not.

"Our ranking did not reflect his eligibility," Dortch said. "If we had known for sure (he would be eligible), they would have been elevated into the top five."

Now that Sarr is eligible, Dortch has no doubt what kind of impact he'll make for Kentucky.

"I think he is the best transfer Cal has ever had and I don't care where he's been," Dortch, who also writes for NBA.com, said. "He is more skilled than most realize and I have watched a ton of film on him."

"He can face up (to the basket) and score. He can pass. He can run the floor in transition. You can throw it down low to him and he can get a basket that way."

"I think he will easily be one of the top five to eight impactful transfers in the country. I just don't think Cal has ever had a better transfer. He's a great kid and great teammate. He definitely elevates Kentucky into a top five situation in my mind."

"Kentucky is right there with the best teams in the country now that Sarr is eligible."

Assistant coach Jai Lucas says not to underestimate the leadership both Sarr and Creighton transfer Davion Mintz add.

"When you have younger kids and younger teams, some of the stuff from high school takes a while to get rid of," Lucas said. "But I think the one thing that those two have done is just been able to kind of add that sense of seriousness, if that's the right word, to getting prepared for practice and what we're trying to do and what we're trying to accomplish for that day. It's very important."

Kentucky held its annual Pro Day last week to give John Calipari's players a chance to make an early impression with NBA scouts. It also gave Calipari a chance to show off his team to the nation during a 90-minute show on the SEC Network.

However, ESPN analyst Jay Bilas says Pro Day is not all that helpful to NBA scouts. He says it's just another "data point" for the scouts.

"It's a great marketing tool. In the past you got NBA people on campus and that created a lot of interest. I think it is a fun thing for players and they enjoy it,"



(UK Athletics Photo)

Kentucky coach Mark Stoops was impressed by the "outpouring of support" after offensive line coach John Schlarman's death last week.

Bilas said. "Nothing but a good thing. It's an early job interview

"But I don't know of any great value. The best value is how you perform in practice. I have not been to one (practice at UK) where NBA scouts were not there. They are there all the time. A lot more goes into any decision to go pro, get drafted than Pro Day."

Kentucky coach John Calipari will be interviewed on an episode of the podcast "How Leaders Lead" with David Novak that will be available starting Nov. 19

"How Leaders Lead" launched in July and has been in the top one percent of Business podcasts on Apple. David Novak is the Founder and former CEO of Yum! Brands (KFC, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut) and since his retirement has created a leadership development company (David Novak Leadership) and leadership podcast.

It's a unique interview with several stories that Calipari has not shared before where he talks about communication, trust and building a successful team.

Novak talks with business, sports and entertainment leaders. His most recent podcast was with golf legend Jack Nicklaus, who won 117 tournaments during his 44-year pro career.

Associate coach Kyra Elzy was elevated to interim coach when Kentucky women's head coach Matthew Mitchell suddenly retired from coaching last week due to health concerns. He had been UK's head coach the last 13 years.

Kentucky opens the season Nov. 25 — less than two weeks after Mitchell's resignation.

Kentucky athletics director Mitch Barnhart, who hired Mitchell, said if he didn't think Elzy would be the "long term solution or thought" he would not have named her interim coach.

"Usually in an interview process you have the opportunity to spend a little time going through a couple of different conversations and just talking philosophically and making sure that you're aligned, and I haven't had the opportunity, because of COVID and how fast this occurred," Barnhart said.

"I didn't get a chance to have those conversations with Kyra, and I think that is an impor-

tant step, in just making sure that you're aligned philosophically and the way we're trying to build our culture and our program, and just making sure that we're thoughtful in that.

"I think that is part of my due diligence, and the thing that I am responsible for as the athletic director, and she understands that, and I think that is a step we all have to take."

Barnhart recalled

smart. She is prepared and she has a game plan, I just want to know what the game plan looks like," Barnhart said. You know, just like any coach, you don't walk in without a game plan, and as the athletic director, I'd like to know what the game plan is."

Barnhart is not going to set a timeline for when he'll meet with Elzy to discuss more because he wants her focused on getting this season started.



(UK Athletics Photo)

Blue Ribbon College Basketball Yearbook publisher Chris Dortch believes Olivier Sarr's eligibility makes Kentucky a legitimate Final Four contender.

Elzy sitting in his office about a year ago talking about what it would take for her to become a head coach.

"I think she knew the answer before she asked the question because she is really

"She has worked really hard over the last six months, and she is ready. We're ready to enjoy the fruits of her labor and how hard she has prepared," Barnhart said.

Football Contest Rules

To enter the contest, contestants may use either this page or an identical page obtained at no charge at the Record-Herald office, 102 West Court Street, Greensburg. You do not have to purchase a paper or anything else to be eligible to win. Only one entry per person. Contestants must circle their winning teams on the page. Should contestants get the same number of games correct, the tie will be broken by the tie-breaker. All entries must be MAILED to the Greensburg Record-Herald, P.O. Box 130, Greensburg, KY 42743. All entries must have an automated postmark no later than FRIDAY, 5 p.m., of this week. To be eligible for the Grand Prize and bonus, an entry must be received by Saturday morning. **Mark all envelopes FOOTBALL CONTEST. NO ENTRIES WILL BE ACCEPTED IN PERSON** at any participating stores or at the Record-Herald. The grand prize will be awarded when a contestant picks the winners of 24 different games. For each week that no one wins, the amount will increase by \$25.

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