

Dane Key and Reed Sheppard grew up playing basketball and baseball against each other



Vaught's Views
Larry Vaught

Dane Key of Lexington has already made his presence felt in a big way on the University of Kentucky football team.

North Laurel senior Reed Sheppard recently signed to play basketball for coach John Calipari at the University of Kentucky. However, while they will be playing different sports at Kentucky, the two Kentuckians started playing against each other at an early age.

"I have known Dane since about third grade. Growing up we used to play against each other. We played baseball and basketball against each other. One of our friends, Turner Buttry, is now at Eastern Kentucky playing basketball," Reed Sheppard said. "Us three use to hang out. I got a few pictures of us together at Kings Island and at Turner's house just hanging out. Dane was one of my good friends."

Reed's mother, Stacey, remembers her son playing baseball for the Bombers out of London and Key playing for the Mudcats out of Richmond.

"Dane was an incredible first baseman. He could hit and run," Stacey said.

Jeff Sheppard, Reed's father, remembers Dane playing against his son and Buttry.

"It was a rivalry in baseball and then Turner and Reed started playing basketball together for me," Jeff Sheppard said. "We kind of met Dane and I already knew Dane's dad, Donte, who played football at Kentucky when I was there. We just kind of re-connected."

"Dane was a great baseball player and a great basketball player, too, because he was so long, athletic and fast. He wasn't really highly skilled in basketball but with his length and everything he was awesome."

Stacey and Jeff Sheppard both played basketball at UK where they met. Jeff was 1998 Final Four MVP when Kentucky won the national championship and Stacey was a standout for the women's team.

"We were all at UK at the same time and Donte and I have remained good friends," Stacey said. "Dane and Reed just kind of grew up together. Now that Reed is also going to Kentucky, it's going to be so neat to watch them and how they have grown up."

Reed and his parents went to a UK football game and ran into Donte Key at Kroger Field.

"He came up and gave me a big hug and we took a picture," Reed said. "It was really cool to see Dane's mom and dad for the first time in a little bit. I am really looking forward to being up there at Kentucky with Dane and being able to hang out with him and start talking to him again."

Reed admits Dane was a better baseball player than him.

"He was on first base and nothing would get by him. You think it was and then he would do the splits and reach out and get the ball. He was so fast, and is still so fast, you could never get him out, either," Reed said. "Dane is a super good athlete and always has been."

In basketball, Reed's team usually won even though he said Key was a force to play against.

"He was super fast and skilled in everything he does and was very good in basketball but I generally had him in basketball," Reed said.

Reed says the two did talk a "little bit" about him also trying football.

"But once he got up in Lexington and was playing, there was no chance I was going to go up there and play against those dudes. They are the real deal at Frederick Douglass," Reed said.

Both will be the "real deal" at UK, too, as Key has already shown this season.

"When I am watching football games, all I am doing is like, 'Throw it to Dane.' He is really good," Jeff Sheppard said. "It's so much fun seeing what he's doing after knowing him, and his father, for so long and now Reed gets to be up there at UK. It's all pretty special."

Erik Martin was an assistant coach at West Virginia when Oscar Tshiebwe played there before transferring to Kentucky and blossoming into the unanimous national player of the year last season.

Martin is now the head coach at South Carolina State and got to watch Tshiebwe again when he brought his team to Rupp Arena last week. Tshiebwe played only 14 minutes because the game was between Michigan State and Gonzaga and coach John Calipari did not want to risk him injuring his knee again.

Tshiebwe had six points on 3-for-6 shooting, seven rebounds and one steal. However, Martin knows how good he is.

"He still looks like Oscar. One time tonight, he missed a shot and by the time the ball was coming off the rim, he was already back up at the ball and getting it on the glass," Martin said.

"I tried to tell our guys, you're going to have to hit him. That doesn't mean you're going to stop him but at least he'll know you're there."

Martin said it is impossible not to be happy for Tshiebwe's success at Kentucky.

"Just seeing his smile, Oscar, he's a great kid. Although I wasn't happy that he left West Virginia, I'm happy that he's doing what he's doing," the South Carolina State coach said. "At the end of the day, when you're a coach, you want these kids to be successful."

"You want them obviously to be successful with you, but if they leave you still cheer. So, I'm glad he's doing well here. I wish he wouldn't have played tonight, but I don't think that would have changed the outcome."

After his record-setting game against Georgia, freshman receiver Barion Brown was not available to the media. That's a bit unusual at Kentucky since the players who have the best games are normally available for interviews and Brown certainly had a big game with 10 catches for 145 yards, both season highs, and one score. It was the most catches by a UK freshman since Chad Scott had 10 in 2000 and most yards by a freshman since Garrett Johnson had 154 in 2014.

The 145 receiving yards were also the second-most for a UK player against a No. 1 ranked team since Rick Kestner had 185 in a win over Mississippi in 1964.

Brown, a highly-rated recruit from Nashville, has been the subject of a lot of speculation about whether a more elite program must hope to land him in the transfer portal with a big NIL deal.

The freshman went on Instagram Live after the game and was asked if he might transfer when the season ended. "I keep telling y'all I am not going nowhere," Brown said.

Quarterback Will Levis understands how special Brown is and has tried to help him all he can.

"It's been important for me to make sure I get him to keep his head up and keep his confidence up to know he's a really special player and we're going to target him and his big plays are going to come," Levis said after the game.

"I'm just glad that he's been able to keep that right mindset throughout the last few weeks, trusting us, trusting the calls and trusting my throws to get him the ball down the field like that. It was really cool to see him go up and make a few of those plays today."

John Calipari says traditionally his best players have always been versatile guards.

"They can play on the ball, they can play off the ball. But they're tough as nails," Calipari said.

Freshman guard Cason Wallace is showing Calipari he has that toughness and versatility.

"He walks in the gym -- and if you remember, Jamal Murray used to make me smile. He would go, 'Smile.' This kid walks in, 'Where's your energy, coach? Energy,'" Calipari said.

"And so he's fun to be around. He's a competitor. It's kind of like Shai (Gilgeous-Alexander) where he says, 'I trust you. Tell me how you want me to play. I trust you.' And he's special."

Wallace also has teammates that can help make him more special.

"With CJ (Frederick), when you have three guys, CJ, Antonio (Reeves) and him on the floor together, you got three guys that can score the ball and shoot the ball and now you got to rebound with those guys," Calipari said.

Veteran point guard Sahvir Wheeler is a Wallace fan, too.

"He makes the game way easier on both ends. On offense, he can be the

primary ball-handler as well, I don't always have to come back and get it," Wheeler said. "He can initiate, he can create plays for himself and others, and defensively, that kind of speaks for itself."

"We're probably two of the premiere, elite on-ball defenders in the country. We try to guard, we complement each other in that way, we're both athletic, we've got speed and ultimately, we make each other better and we make our teammates better."

Frederick Douglass junior defensive back Jeremiah Lowe has known teammate Ty Bryant, a senior and University of Kentucky commit, since middle school.

"We went to the same school. He played with my brother," Lowe said. "He is a great guy, a great leader on and off the field. Everybody on the team looks up to him."

Lowe said there's one thing that always impresses him about Bryant.

"He's just got that dog in him. Whatever it takes to win, that's what he's going to do," Bryant said.

That is one major reason Bryant has been named the Paul Hornung Award winner given by the Louisville Quarterback Club to the state's most outstanding player. Hornung was a former Notre Dame All-American and NFL standout who was a versatile player.

Bryant was recruited as a defensive back but is a safety, running back kick returner for Douglass. He ran for 106 yards and the go-ahead score in last week's Class 5A playoff win over Woodford County. He has rushed for 458 yards and 11 scores, returned three punts for touchdowns, made 17 tackles and intercepted one pass this season.

Lowe and Bryant are part of what has been an overpowering Douglass defense that has the Broncos in the Class 5A state semifinals against Owensboro.

"Me and Ty have also played high school baseball together," Lowe, who has a Kentucky football scholarship offer, said. "He's a really good baseball player too."

Lowe and Bryant both had to practice against current UK freshman receiver Dane Key.

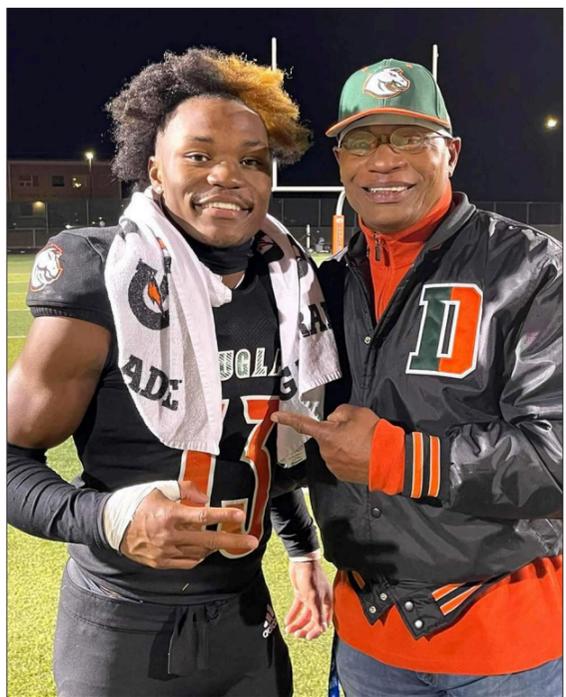
"It does not surprise me at all what Dane has done because we have seen him doing it for years. He's that good," Lowe said.



Kentucky basketball signee Reed Sheppard with Donte Key, father of UK freshman football player Dane Key, before a recent UK home game. (Jeff Sheppard Photo)



South Carolina State coach Erik Martin coached Oscar Tshiebwe at West Virginia and is happy he's doing so well at Kentucky. (South Carolina State Photo)



Frederick Douglass defensive back/running back Ty Bryant, a UK commit and son of former UK defensive back Cisco Bryant, is this year's Paul Hornung Award winner given to the state's top player. (Terri Mims Bryant Photo)



Former UK quarterback Tim Couch hopes Lexington Christian's Cutter Boley, a four-star quarterback, will also continue to play basketball in high school. (Chris Zollner Photo)