

Cole McLean’s mom happy with son’s UK decision



Vaught's Views
Larry Vaught

Cole McLean was the 2025 Kentucky Gatorade Player of the Year when he struck out 127 batters in 65 1/3 innings and went 9-1 on the mound for Taylor County. The left-handed pitcher originally committed to Tennessee but later flipped his commitment to Kentucky.

In 2026 he was 9-1 with a 0.23 ERA. He had 125 strikeouts in 60 innings and gave up just 15 hits. He walked eight and allowed only two earned runs all season. McLean also hit .453 with 11 home runs, 43 RBIs and 15 stolen bases in 33 games.

McLean’s mother, Farrah McLean, was a standout high school athlete and is now an assistant coach for the Taylor County girls basketball team. She is already a huge fan of Kentucky coach Nick Mingione.

“He is an amazing human,” Farrah McLean said. She remembered how her son decommitted from Tennessee on a Thursday and the next day he went on his visit to Kentucky.

“We told Cole, ‘We’re not committing this weekend. We’re going to go check out your opportunities.’ We wanted him to take his time in the process and really make sure we had the right fit because he’d been committed to Tennessee for several years,” Farrah McLean said.

“But when you sat and you talked to coach Minge, I mean how can you say no to him? He is an amazing coach, an amazing Christian. As a mom, I am not only excited about his baseball opportunities, but also just as a human being from being around coach Minge and the program. Just what he expects and how he runs things is just first class and I am glad my son gets to play for a man like that.”

Malachi Brown’s father played college football at Marshall University and his uncle played for Ole Miss.

“Malachi always had a football in his hands,” said Torino Brown, Malachi’s father. “His uncle was about 6-foot-5 and Malachi always prayed for height and the other abilities that God has blessed him with. He was always doing drills as a kid and I told him if he kept working, he could be special. He took me seriously and put in the work at a young age.”

The 6-foot-4,

265-pound Brown, age 17, is now one of the nation’s elite defensive linemen. He had 62 solo tackles, including 11 tackles for loss and eight quarterback sacks, at Corbin High School in 2025. He’s a four-star recruit ranked as one of the nation’s top 300 overall players by Rivals Industry Rankings.

He recently committed to Kentucky over offers from Alabama, Miami, Ohio State, Tennessee, Indiana and many others.

“We told Malachi just to keep his eyes open and if he saw what he liked, then go for it,” his father said. “I am not going to play. My wife is not going to play. Coach (Will) Stein and his guys were amazing. He went to practices and made unofficial and official visits. He fell in love with Kentucky.

“Big Blue Nation has been good to him. He will be a better player than I ever was. He will far surpass me with his talent.

Torino Brown played at Marshall with current Corbin coach Luke Salmons, who came to Corbin in 2024 after 13 seasons as head coach at West Virginia’s Cabell Midland High School.

“I played tackle and graduated (from Marshall) in 2004 but a couple of injuries set me back,” Torino Brown said. “I am grateful Malachi played the same position as me. I had a good career but he has had a chance to learn what I didn’t.”

When Salmons got the job at Corbin, Malachi Brown’s family decided to make the move to Kentucky also. Salmons’ son, Mason, is Corbin’s quarterback and completed 113 of 177 passes with just two interceptions for 2,401 yards and 30 touchdowns last season and ran for 503 yards and eight scores.

“I have coached Mason for four years. We were always together and getting ideas off each other. We liked being around each other. I knew they had a great school system here in Corbin, so we made the move his sophomore year and it has been great,” Torino Brown said.

Malachi Brown has one edge over most young athletes — his father is a chef.

“He’s always been much bigger than other kids but I have been able to make sure he has proper nutrition,” Torino Brown said. “We go out to dinner here and there but mainly prepare meals at home. We have eggs, rice and some protein with beef, chicken or turkey. My wife (who is a nurse practitioner) and I prepare different foods for him. He fell in love early with brisket and steaks but his favorite

food is chicken tenders. He will pick that over steaks. He has a big appetite. He loves to eat so we make sure he eats the right foods and he understands that.”

Malachi Brown tried other sports when he was young. He played soccer and basketball, the sport his mother wanted him to play.

“He had different abilities and talent but football was always number one with him and basketball was second,” Torino Brown said. “Basketball did help with his footwork and that transitioned to the football field.”

The UK commit has trained with his father three or four times a week for the last year.

“He loves the work. He takes the approach if you want to be the best you have got to train. He’s really taken that to heart,” Torino Brown said. “I think he’s really glad he has made his college choice. Now he can do his workouts, eat the proper food and get in extra training. He can focus on all that and not take a flight or travel (to other schools).

“I told coach Stein he was getting a great player. My high school won a national championship. I know how far sports can take you and what you can accomplish and achieve. Malachi has always said he wanted to go to the NFL. Millions of kids say that. He has taken that to heart and he believes Kentucky is the school that can help develop him to get there.”

Kentucky defensive line coach Anwar Stewart came highly recommended.

“A guy I played with in college played in the Canadian Football League with him. He said he was a tremendous guy who really coaches kids up,” Torino Brown said. “Malachi fell in love with him. He gained relationships with a lot of coaches but coach Stewart means business. We know he can help Malachi get to where he wants to be.”

What is new Kentucky men’s basketball coach Mo Williams like?

He is a 13-year NBA veteran who was the head coach at Jackson State the previous four years before joining coach Mark Pope’s staff at UK this season. He’s already making a name for himself with his recruiting prowess.

“He’s been great. He’s a winner,” UK redshirt sophomore center Reece Potter. “He came from the NBA and just his stories and stuff about how much we all want to get to the next level. It’s another person for us to listen to. We have coach Pope that has



Farrah McLean, back center, is excited that her son, pitcher Cole McLean, gets to play for an “amazing” man like Kentucky coach Nick Mingione. (Colby Vaught Photo)

played (in the NBA) and now we get to listen to another great coach being able to push us.”

Recruits have praised Williams for the relationships he establishes and recent UK commit Ryan Hampton, a top 10 player in the 2027 class, admitted it was Williams who closed the deal with him. He’s been nicknamed the “Closer” and Potter believes it is a great nickname.

“He’s loving it, so I feel like that’s a great nickname for him. The Closer is pretty sick and he was able to close some deals and it was pretty awesome for us,” Potter said.

Potter calls him a “fun-loving coach” who can also be a “hard ass” when needed.

“I feel like all coaches are a little hard ass when it comes down to it. They have to be if we are not doing the right things,” Potter said. “We’re still young men, so sometimes we aren’t the most focused. But him being able to teach us every single day ... he did it at the highest level and was a very impactful player at that level. He’s able to work with all of us and help us experience stuff that makes us better.”

Notre Dame transfer Morgan Gaerte, a 6-foot-5 junior hitter, was a first-team all-ACC player last season when she had 497 kills in 28 matches. That was the most kills by a Notre Dame player in the rally-scoring era (2008-present) and third-most overall in all scoring eras.

Gaerte and teammate Asia Thigpen recently went on a trip to Costa Rica with UK All-American gymnasts Creslyn Brose and Delaynee Rodriguez for del Sueno Mar Beachfront Hotel.

“Morgan is absolutely amazing and so easy to talk to and very easy to be around,” Brose said. “She is definitely somebody that I feel close with now. Same with Asia (Thigpen). They are both awesome but Morgan is very outgoing and very kind.



Corbin defensive lineman Malachi Brown and his parents at Keeneland during his visit to Kentucky.



New Kentucky assistant coach Mo Williams (with his son Mason) is known as a recruiter but also has the experience to help keep UK players focused. (UK Athletics Photo)

Brose and Rodriguez did not play volleyball against Gaerte and Thigpen in Costa Rica where the two UK volleyball players held a clinic for local girls but did retrieve balls for them during the youth clinic.

Brose said it was a “great opportunity” for the gymnasts to spend time with athletes from another sport in Costa Rica.

“I love opportunities like that because we actually get to expand from our team a little bit,” Brose said. “Obviously, we do so much with our team but then

you’re on campus and around people that you wish were friends with you and wish you knew more,” Brose said. “But with these kinds of things we were able to share experiences together, and I feel like that created a special bond between the four of us.”

“We even talked about it when we were there. We’re like, ‘When we come back, we should do bonfires at each other’s houses and just hang out. Just that kind of stuff. So definitely I feel like getting close with athletes from other teams is awesome.’”

Quote of the Week:

“I want them to know that they’re important; that every single one of our fans matter. The strength of Big Blue Nation comes down to one individual and that person showing up in whatever way they can,” new UK athletics director J Blatt on the support of Kentucky fans.

Quote of the Week 2:

“He understands that my best games and plays are in front of me. I know he can help me develop on the field and in the weight room and turn me into a monster on the field. I know he can be tough but I 100 percent like that kind of coaching,”

UK commit Griff Galloway on Kentucky defensive line coach Anwar Stewart.

Quote of the Week 3:

“We’re excited to open the season against Kentucky. Playing one of the premier programs in college basketball is exactly the kind of challenge we want. This is the kind of game that speaks to the tradition and pride of our squad,”

Manhattan coach John Gallagher on opening the season Nov. 3 against UK in Rupp Arena.

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