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CATS LOOK TO FOLLOW LAST YEAR’S SUCCESS

PIGSKIN PREVIEW

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Meet our Sports Staff

I’m from Ashland, Ky., and a senior broadcast journalism major at UK. This will be my second year as sports editor and I’m very excited to create more awesome stories and content for our audience.

Mohammad Ahmad

I’m a senior graduating early in December. Outside of the Kernel, I’m a high school football sideline reporter for ESPN Sports Radio Lexington WLXG. I’ve also completed internships at WLEX-18 and KFSN-AM in St. Louis.

Chase Campbell

I’m a senior journalism major from Oldham County, and this is my fourth year working for the Kernel. I love basketball and I hope to one day get to a job covering the NBA.

Erika Bonner

I’m from Ashland, Ky., and a senior broadcast journalism major at UK. This will be my second year as sports editor and I’m very excited to create more awesome stories and content for our audience.
Despite SEC policy change, UK opts for no alcohol sales at student tailgate or in stadium

By Hailey Peters
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Earlier this year, the Southeastern Conference revised their policy preventing the sale of alcohol at athletic events.
The SEC handed the decision-making power over to individual universities to decide for themselves whether or not they want to sell alcohol to the public at athletic events. Several SEC schools chose to make alcohol sales an attraction and selling point for fans, but UK chose to keep its home sporting events dry.
“It is our goal, as well as our responsibility, to create a safe, secure, positive, engaging environment for fans of all ages and from all walks of life,” said UK Athletics Director Mitch Barnhart when he announced the decision to remain dry at an early August press conference. “We believe we have an outstanding college fan experience at our games. Though we recognize we can always find ways to do better, we’re also careful about disrupting what we have currently in place.”
The new alcohol policy will stand for the upcoming year, but the university acknowledged that it may not remain permanent. During the press conference, Barnhart left the door open for possibly reconsidering the policy next year.
According to UK spokespersons, the university administration as a whole supports the athletics department’s decision and is ready and willing to assist in any needed adjustments.
“The SEC has taken the right approach to this important issue by deferring to the individual, member institutions to make decisions about what is in the best interests of each university, their programs, and their fans,” UK spokesperson Jay Blanton said. “Led by Director Barnhart, UK will take the next several months to consider this issue. We will, as always, seek to do what is right for the University, our student-athletes, and the experience and safety of our fans.”

In-stadium sales are not the only ones that will cease this year. Purchasing alcohol at any pre-game fan zones will also be stopped. Until last year, of-age students were allowed to bring their own alcohol into an on-campus tailgating area known as The Bowl.
In the fall of 2018, UK administration moved the student tailgating area to the fenced-in Pieratt Fields behind the Johnson Center and prohibited students from bringing in their own alcohol. Instead, of-age students could buy

Students tailgate at ‘The Bowl’ prior to a game at Kroger Field on Saturday, September 5, 2015, in Lexington, Kentucky. KERNEL FILE
alcohol from vendors within the tailgating area. This upcoming football season, those alcohol sales will stop.

Barnhart stressed that the new policy came from a concern for the safety of UK fans at athletic events.

Guy Ramsey, Director of Strategic Communication for UK Athletics, elaborated on the specifics of the safety concerns.

“With what happened last year especially, we want to minimize the risk of any serious accidents,” Ramsey said, referring to the death of 4-year-old Marco Shemwell after a football game last season. “We don’t believe that students at UK should need to drink heavily to have an incredible fan and student experience, and we don’t want to compromise the safety of people who come to our games.”

UK’s dry policy, has one contingency: premium club seating. Fans who have seats in premium club areas such as the Woodford Reserve Club at Kroger Field will be able to still purchase alcohol within luxury areas.

The exception for club members to be able to purchase alcohol while the rest of the stadium cannot join has left several UK fans feeling overlooked and upset.

Ben Stone, a sophomore chemical engineering major at UK and loyal ticket holder at several athletics events believes that the new policy is simply a way to reward the fans that have the money to pay for more expensive seating throughout the athletics season.

“The current alcohol policy is hypocritical and divides the Big Blue Nation by economic status,” Stone said. “By serving alcohol to those in clubs and suites, but not the general audience, gives the impression that UK does not trust or value its fans.”

Barnhart has commented on the decision to still allow the sale of alcohol at club levels, saying that he and his staff believe that the college gameday experience is achieved enough in the common bowl with tens of thousands of other fans next to each other all wearing the same color and cheering for the same team.

The athletics staff will continue to monitor the decisions of other SEC schools to see what those outcomes are going to become, but Barnhart said he is looking for a more permanent policy on alcohol sales and hopes that this is the right one to keep a balance between a fan’s enjoyment and safety.
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After overcoming cancer, Paschal looks to be a leader on defense

By Erika Bonner
sports@kykernel.com

For a lot of student athletes, finding a balance between school, athletics and having a life outside of those things is a hard thing to juggle.

But imagine that combined with making time for doctors’ appointments and cancer treatments – that’s been UK linebacker Josh Paschal’s reality for the past year.

But that ended August 7.

“I’m excited to announce that today was my last immunotherapy treatment for melanoma!” Paschal announced on Twitter.

“I have a lot of people to thank. First, I want to thank my Lord and Savior for guiding me through this difficult time. My faith has only become stronger.

I want to thank my family and my girlfriend for being there every step of the way and never missing a treatment. I would like to thank my family and brothers from back home for continually supporting me.

I want to thank the surgeons, doctors and nurses at (UK Markey Center) for taking good care of me. Lastly, to the athletic trainers, my teammates, my coaches and everyone in the #BBN, thank you for supporting me, praying for me and getting me back to 100. I can’t wait for what God has in store for me next. See you this fall!!"

Paschal has been open about his cancer journey throughout the process, which started around this time last year. In Mark Stoops’ opening statement at 2018 UK Football media day, he broke the news about Paschal having melanoma on his foot. Things do come full circle though, and at the 2019 media day at the beginning of August, the linebacker was happy to say he was almost finished with his treatments and said it was important that he remained hopeful rather than feel sorry for himself.

“I knew I had that goal that I was going to get my body the way I wanted it to be, I was going to get my foot the way I wanted it to be,” Paschal said. “Just really work on my craft and know what I wanted to work on.”

Throughout everything he was going through last year, there was still glimpses of what Paschal was capable of on the football field. He had recovered sufficiently enough to grab a starting spot that day and made a tackle on third down to force a punt, sending the crowd into a standing ovation. Paschal, who underwent four surgeries over the course of his year-long battle says he wouldn’t have the strength that he does without all of the support he has around him.

“I mean, of course there’s been trials and everything, but I have my faith and my faith has grown tremendously during this time. My teammates and their support, coaches always supporting me, my family of course, my friends from back home, just all the support I’m getting has really been getting me through everything,” Paschal said. “It’s also built relationships that I would’ve never had, you know people just that I’ve talked to at the Markey Center. Just building relationships with them, being able to go to the women’s clinic like I did a couple of days ago, and just people coming up to me and telling me about how they’re cancer survivors and how they looked up to me.”

Josh Paschal poses for a photo during football media day on Friday, Aug. 2, 2019, at Kroger Field in Lexington, Kentucky. JORDAN PRATHER I STAFF

Paschal says he expects to have a big role this year at jack linebacker.

“I want to be a captain, a leader of this defense,” Paschal said. “I want to lead this defense. So that’s something that I’m going to have to be more vocal on the defense and really just set a standard.”

I mean, of course there’s been trials and everything, but I have my faith and my faith has grown tremendously during this time.

JOSH PASCHAL
UK’s top running back says the Boy Scouts taught him the ‘man skills’ to be a leader

By Chase Campbell

In the Boy Scouts of America, reaching the rank of Eagle Scout takes an incredible commitment. I know this because I tried, and ultimately didn’t reach it. One person that did, though – UK football running back AJ Rose.

“I didn’t tell anybody (on the team)” Rose said at UK’s Media Day. “I just kept that to myself. A little self-confidence thing, you know?”

To reach the rank of Eagle Scout, one must have been a Life Scout – the fifth rank on the ladder – for six months, earn 21 merit badges demonstrating specific personal and outdoor skills, plan a service project that benefits his community and undergo a board of review by Scout leaders from the area.

Rose completed all this for Troop 983 in his hometown of Cleveland, Ohio. After coming to UK, he kept it to himself so that not even his fellow running back, Kavosiey Smoke, knew.

“I never heard of it. He didn’t ever tell anybody that,” Smoke said. “That’s something new I just heard today.”

Smoke did say, though, that it made sense because of Rose’s drive to be a leader.

“He feels like he’s got to step up... he’s the biggest leader of our group, and I appreciate him for that,” Smoke said.

For Rose, though, being an Eagle Scout wasn’t about showing a title to demonstrate that he has the abilities to be a leader. It was about developing himself.

“It definitely impacts me on the field,” Rose said. “The toughness, the grit... just teaching me man skills. I use those skills every day in my life.

“Once I start something, I finish it. Once I started Boy Scouts, I knew the highest rank was Eagle so I had no choice but to finish it.”

AJ ROSE

Rose said he’s excited that UK will host a Boy Scout troop at a game this season, and that it’s something he’s really looking forward to because he always loves spending time with troop members and those in the organization.

A lot of players can say they’re leaders and demonstrate that in the locker room. Rose showed up with the credentials before he even stepped on the field.
The Kentucky football team came into camp this summer knowing they’d have to replace several productive bodies. Josh Allen, Benny Snell, Lonnie Johnson, Mike Edwards and George Asafo-Adjei were all taken in the most recent NFL Draft, leaving holes all over the field on both sides of the ball.

A hole they didn’t expect to need was filled was junior safety Davonte Robinson. Robinson was fresh off a career year, recovering a fumble for WKU, more than doubling his tackle totals and seeing three starts as a sophomore. It included three tackles for loss from his safety spot, two fumble recoveries and four pass deflections without being a cover man. He was poised to be the unquestioned best defensive back.

Unfortunately, before UK even welcomed reporters in for Media Day, Robinson suffered a quad injury that will sideline him for the entire 2019 season. UK’s young defense gets a whole lot younger.

Because of this, brand new players may be thrust into the fire right away.

One candidate is Moses Douglass. Ranked as one of the top 30 recruits at safety in the nation by two different recruiting services, the four-star freshman could very well be asked to log playing time to help the safeties replace Robinson, Edwards and Darius West.

How does he feel about it? Well… “(We’ve got to) put our big boy pants on, because it’s time to ride,” Douglass said. “I’ve been studying more, getting film sessions with (Robinson), you’ve got to actually talk to him because that’s a big spot to fill. Everyone wants to know what they’re going to do.”

While Douglass acknowledged that Robinson going down hurts the team’s chances to win, he also appreciates the sense of competition that it gave all the other defensive backs. “There’s going to be a lot of competition at that spot. There’s going to be a lot of boys fighting for that job,” Douglass said as he started to grin.

He recollected himself and started emphasizing caution for the other players, new and old. “You really don’t think anything’s going to happen until it does. It just opened a lot of our eyes.”

Douglass will be far from the only one competing for a safety spot – Tyrell Aijan, Jordan Griffin and Jusuf Corker will be the main competitors for the two main safety positions. Without a second string player clearly above him, though, there’s a serious chance Douglass could see field time as a freshman to help cover for the loss of Robinson.

Looks like it’s time for him to put his “big boy pants on,” as he said.
REMEMBERING A LEGEND

Jared Lorenzen still tops the school record books. Here's how he stacks up against UK's other great quarterbacks.

JARED LORENZEN

TOTAL OFFENSIVE YARDS: 10,637
PASSING YARDS: 10,354
TOTAL TOUCHDOWNS: 90

ANDRÉ WOODSON
(2004-2007)

TOTAL OFFENSIVE YARDS: 8,870
TOTAL TOUCHDOWNS: 84

TIM COUCH
(1996-1998)

TOTAL OFFENSIVE YARDS: 8,160
TOTAL TOUCHDOWNS: 78

Jared Lorenzen's hard-throwing, bull-running, school-record-setting style of football will be heavy on the minds of the Wildcat faithful as the team and the fanbase honor the death of a Kentucky-born quarterback. UK's Oct. 12 game against Arkansas has been dubbed "Jared Lorenzen Day" by UK Athletics. Fans and the team will honor the man who wore 22.
‘Even if you played 10, 15 years ago, they still care about you.’

Big Blue Nation looks to honor Lorenzen this season

By Mohammad Ahmad

UK quarterback Terry Wilson, known by some as “Touchdown Terry,” is a name that will be on the minds of Kentucky football fans with a new season looming.

But he isn’t the only quarterback on the minds of the Kentucky faithful.

Former Kentucky quarterback Jared Lorenzen’s passing is and will be fresh on the minds of Wildcat fans. Known as “The Hefty Lefty” or “The Pillsbury Throwboy,” Lorenzen died from cardiac and renal issues in July, stunning those who watched or knew him.

With fans, friends and football lovers absorbing the news of Lorenzen’s passing, Wilson hinted at a possible tribute to the “deuce deuce” being Lorenzen’s former Wildcat jersey number, 22.

When asked about the idea of wearing 22 in the Wildcats’ August 31st season opener against the Toledo Rockets, Wilson says he simply felt like “it was a good idea.”

“I looked (Jared) up a lot. I even watched a few games that he played in. I just knew how much he meant to this program,” Wilson said during UK’s media day. “I just felt like I needed to show my appreciation.”

He did say, however, that “wearing 22 is still up in the air,” so there’s no guarantee that he will wear Lorenzen’s number. UK football head coach Mark Stoops echoed Wilson, saying that, while he didn’t know Lorenzen as well as others did, he understood the late quarterback’s impact.

“Terry reached out to me about the idea after (Lorenzen’s death) and my initial thought was, ‘That’s a great idea.’ Just having him possibly wear that jersey in the opener, we’ll talk about that,” Stoops said after Lorenzen’s July 10 visitation. “I talked to Jared’s family and said in some shape or form we will recognize him.”

Kentucky fans remember Lorenzen with good reason. In his time at UK from 2000 to 2003, the Covington, Kentucky, native and state “Mr. Football” threw for 10,354 yards, 78 touchdowns and 41 interceptions with a 56.9 percent completion percentage. Lorenzen, a two-time Davey O’Brien National Quarterback Award finalist, currently holds several UK, SEC and NCAA passing records.

Lorenzen signed with the New York Giants as an undrafted free agent in 2004. He backed up Eli Manning for parts of four seasons, winning a Super Bowl ring in the process. After being waived by the Indianapolis Colts in 2008, he spent several years playing indoor football before retiring for good. He was elected to the UK Athletics Hall of Fame in 2015.

With one season and a bowl victory under his belt as a Wildcat, Wilson has shown progress but is still far from having matched Lorenzen’s legacy. Nonetheless, if Wilson ends up wearing number 22, he could become one step closer to becoming another memorable Wildcat. He recognizes what it means to be a Kentucky fan favorite.

“I just knew that they love Jared a lot and I guess that meant a lot to them that I even mentioned to wear his number,” Wilson said. “It just shows that how the Big Blue Nation is and how they care a lot about their players. Even if you played 10, 15 years ago, they still care about you.”
After losing nine players and the coordinator, UK’s defense looks to fill gaps with worthy replacements

By Mohammad Ahmad
sports@kykernel.com

Out with the old, in with the new.
That could be the 2019 Kentucky football defense’s mantra. With nine defenders leaving a defense that finished second in the SEC in total defense last season, some big shoes need to be filled.

Defensive end Josh Allen’s departure hit the team the hardest. He received multiple accolades after anchoring the Cats’ defense last season before being drafted seventh overall by the Jacksonville Jaguars this past April.

“You can’t replace Josh (Allen),” UK defensive coordinator Brad White said during media day. “Everybody knows that. Everybody knows Josh was a special talent, one of those generational-type players. What we have to do now is find the next one. It’s finding the next guy that’s going to elevate his game.”

Perhaps one of White’s biggest challenges in his first year as defensive coordinator might be molding Allen’s replacement. He did, however, hint at his confidence in several rising linebackers and rushers on the depth chart.

“When you have T.J. Carter, Calvin Taylor, you bring in a Looney, a Phil Hoskins, I mean, we should be able to have some success interiorly,” White said. “Then when I look out there and see guys like Kash (Daniel) and (DeAndre) Square and (Chris) Oats and Jamin (Davis), inside linebackers that can blitz, cause all kinds of issues.”

Both seniors, the 6-foot-9-inch, 310-pound, Taylor and the 6-foot-4-inch, 289-pound Carter provide an imposing presence on the front line. Outside linebacker Jamar “Boogie” Watson, who had five sacks last season, provides another piece of veteran talent who can help replace Allen’s presence.

Josh Paschal’s return and the possible addition of Florida State transfer Xavier Peters deepens the outside linebacking corps. Inexperienced yet potential-filled freshmen edge rushers J.J. Weaver, Jared Casey, KD McDaniel and Shawn Kel Knight-Goff will look to complement White’s 3-4 defense.

Senior linebacker Kash Daniel will help fill those major gaps left behind. Entering his final season, Daniel was a major contributor to UK’s defense last year, finishing the season with 84 tackles, half of them solo and 7.5 of them for a loss. Expect to see first-year inside linebacker’s coach Jon Sumrall working strongly with team-captain Daniel on leading the inside rush.

“When you take out a guy like Josh (Allen) out of the equation, you’re gonna say, ‘How do you have the same kind of defense?’” Daniel said. “What Coach White is doing is taking our defense and making tweaks to it to where we’re not relying on an outside linebacker rush. It’s like an offense running the same plays from a different formation.”

While the defensive front is an exclamation point, the defensive backfield is a question mark. Losing five defensive backs may have been hard enough for head coach Mark Stoops but losing safety Davonte Robinson to season-ending surgery may have been an even harder pill to swallow.

“We feel for Davonte most because I know the amount of work that he’s put in to put himself in a position to be one of the guys. He’s so versatile,” Stoops said on media day. “He also was a great cover guy. The other thing, he was one of our best tacklers… It’s going to be missed.”

While he hasn’t announced his backfield starters, Stoops said veteran safety Jordan Griffin will play a key role in filling the void left by Robinson. Griffin played in 12 of 13 games last year, finishing with 13 tackles. Other supporting cast members like returner Tyrell Ajian, alongside freshmen like Moses Douglass, the speedy MJ Devonshire and Brandon Eichols could help tie the loose ends in the backfield.

Despite the inexperience of young stars looking to step up and make a difference for a rebooted defense, returning vets will look to maintain the Cats’ momentum from last year with hopes that they can win back-to-back bowl games. Those prospects leave Stoops excited.

“You learn so many things throughout the years,” Stoops said. “You try to use it to put your team in the best position to be successful. That’s what I think excites me and our staff and our players about this year, this opportunity with this team.”
In week one of the long-awaited 2019 football season, the Kentucky Wildcats will face off against the Toledo Rockets, one of their two Mid-American Conference opponents of the season. The Rockets went 7-6 overall and 5-3 in the MAC in 2018, which included a bowl game against Florida International in the Bahamas.

Despite the winning record, a victory over a school rival and a bowl game, most Rockets fans would consider last season a “down year.” Why? Because a 2017 MAC championship streak in 2018, what could this year’s game possibly have in store?

We’re unsure of that at this point, but we do know that expectations have been set very high for this 2019 Toledo Rockets team. The first being Toledo, the second being the Eastern Michigan Eagles, who the Cats played just two seasons ago in 2017.

EMU went 7-6 overall and 5-3 in the MAC, however, many of the Eagles’ losses were close ones as five of their six L’s were decided by a touchdown or less. On the defensive side of things, EMU looks to fill a big hole where defensive end Maxx Crosby left—the now-Oakland Raider posted 41 tackles for loss, 20 sacks and eight forced fumbles for the Eagles.

Despite losing 13 starters, EMU returns 13. They lost their starting quarterback, but Mike Glass III looks to fill the role as a dual-threat. Last season Glass played eight games, passing for 1,024 yards and nine touchdowns, gained 412 yards on the ground and added six scores. The last time UK and EMU went head-to-head, the Cats earned a 24-20 victory.

For the first time since 1991, the Wildcats will play two games in a season against Mid-American Conference teams. The first being Toledo, the second being the Eastern Michigan Eagles, who the Cats played just two seasons ago in 2017.

EMU went head-to-head, scores. The last time UK and Toledo set the bar high for Toledo set the bar high for 2018, but an injury-riddled team couldn’t make it happen again. After finishing third in the MAC West last year, Toledo looks to looks to use its revamped defense to replicate its 2017 season.

If this year is anything like the last two times the Cats and Gators have played, we’re in for a heck of a football game. After a jaw-dropping 28-27 loss to Florida in 2017 and the end of the Cats’ 31-year losing streak in 2018, what could this year’s game possibly have in store?

The Bulldogs are coming off an 8-5 season, one of its losses coming from the Wildcats in one of the best (if not the best) games UK played all season. Joe Moorhead is going into his second year as head coach of Mississippi State and looks to use his offensive-mindedness to lead MSU to a leading spot in the SEC West.

According to the Clarion Ledger, Moorhouse said earlier this month that his offensive line might be one of the biggest he’s ever worked with, which will help pave the way for running backs like Kylin Hill and quarterback Nick Fitzgerald.

A big storyline for the Bulldogs will be whether or not the defense can live up to the standard it set last year, which was one of the best in the country. It gave up only 15 touchdowns in 13 games and held opponents to just 2.9 yards per carry.

Another front-runner is Nick Starkel, also a transfer, whose experience with the offense at Texas A&M may put him a step ahead with Arkansas’ offensive schemes. Last season the Razorbacks posted a rough 2-10 record that included 0-8 in the conference.

Will Muschamp’s squad posted a 7-6 (4-4 SEC) record last year, only losing eight starters and returning 16. The Gamecocks were injury-ridden in 2018 and are tasked with getting their players healthy in order to reach their full potential this year, especially on defense.

South Carolina took a big loss with All-SEC wideout Deebo Samuel moving on to the NFL, but the Gamecocks return receiver Bryan Edwards, who enters his senior season at SMU.

A quarterback battle has struck the Razorbacks, and it’s the number one question heading into this season. They have several options, one being Ben Hicks, who was the first-team option throughout the spring and has experience from playing at SMU.

A week later, it’s time to see the South Carolina Gamecocks and South Carolina take on each other. Will Muschamp’s squad posted a 7-6 (4-4 SEC) record last year, only losing eight starters and returning 16. The Gamecocks were injury-ridden in 2018 and are tasked with getting their players healthy in order to reach their full potential this year, especially on defense.

South Carolina took a big loss with All-SEC wideout Deebo Samuel moving on to the NFL, but the Gamecocks return their starting quarterback in Jake Bentley. The 6-foot-4, 220-pound senior has the potential to be near the top of almost every school statistical category. His top target is likely to be senior Bryan Edwards, who enters the season ranked fifth in receptions in program history. The Gamecock defense has starters on all three levels—especially the defensive line which returns four seniors.
To no surprise, the Georgia Bulldogs are expected to be one of the best teams in the country—the AP Preseason Poll has them ranked at No. 3. In one of the most highly anticipated games of Kentucky’s season last year, the Dawgs came to Lexington to compete with the Cats for the SEC East title and won.

Georgia running backs, D’Andre Swift and the now-Carolina Panther Eli Drinkwitz, wreaked havoc on Kentucky’s defense while the Bulldog defense held UK to just 84 rushing yards. This year, Georgia returns leading passer Jake Fromm and Swift, and has a veteran offensive line to protect them. Defensively, four of UGA’s five leading tacklers are back.

Mizzou stood 8-5 last year and was led by Drew Lock, a component of the Tigers’ offense that will be greatly missed. Replacing him is Clemson graduate transfer Kelly Bryant, who is supported by one of the best receivers in the SEC, Johnathon Johnson.

Johnson had 59 catches for 737 yards and five touchdowns last season. Mizzou running back Larry Rountree III will help give the Tigers some balance—he ran for 1,216 yards as a sophomore.

Missouri landed eight players on the 2019 Preseason All-SEC Teams—the fifth-most by any team and the second-most of any SEC East team, trailing only Georgia.

When Kentucky was ranked No. 11 in the country last season, the Volunteers earned a 24-7 win over the Cats in Knoxville, an outcome that not many had predicted. After going 5-7 overall, head coach Jeremy Pruitt heads into his second year at UT with a third-year starting quarterback in Jarrett Guarantano, along with a good amount of returning starters.

The Vols have several position battles going, even though some of those players in their respective positions were freshman All-Americans just a year ago. Competitions at corner and punter is something to keep an eye on as the 2019 season starts.

The Cats travel a few hours south to take on the Commodores, who are returning 11 starters for the 2019 season. Like several teams on UK’s schedule, there’s a lot of question marks concerning Vandy’s depth chart, especially on defense and at the quarterback position.

Three of their four top linebackers are gone, including their lead tackler, Jordan Griffin. Of course, losing Kyle Shurmur, Vandy’s all-time leading passer (8,865 yards) is a huge loss. But one thing is for sure about this year’s Commodores: Ke’Shawn Vaughn is ready to make some noise. The star running back rushed for 724 yards and seven touchdowns during a four-game stretch late last season in SEC play.

In-state nemesis Louisville and the Cats will go head-to-head on Senior Day this year, Kentucky’s very last regular season game. The Cards are looking for a fresh start with new head coach Scott Satterfield after a 2-10 campaign last season.

Jawon Pass and Malik Cunningham are both weapons at quarterback, both earning starts last season, and are battling for a starting position. On defense, UofL has installed a new 3-4 operation, which will shift some of the returners into new positions.
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Season predictions from our sports editors

What will the Cats’ final 2019 record be?

Erika: 7-5. I realize I also made that same exact prediction last year and was embarrassingly wrong, so here’s to hoping this doesn’t bite me in the butt again. What the Cats did last year was incredible and will be extremely hard to match, although I don’t think anyone is expecting 10 wins again. 2019 will be a solid, winning season under Stoops that keeps the program relevant and credible, but with so many personnel changes, it will be tough to have as much success as they did last season.

Mohammad: I second Erika and say 7-5 as well. The Cats’ potential is up there and they have a chance to replicate success similar to last year. But I’m not fully convinced they can go 9-3 like last season because of the mammoth holes left behind by the likes of Josh Allen, Benny Snell, Lonnie Johnson and Mike Edwards to name a few. There’s some inexperience, especially on defense, but I think returning stars like Kash Daniel, Terry Wilson and Lynn Bowden will help keep the team afloat this season.

Chase: Before Davonte Robinson went down, you could convince me they’d go 9-3, though I’d have some reservations. What helps the Cats this year is a generally easy schedule. I expect them to get walloped by Florida and Georgia, but their other ten games are extremely winnable. Toledo will be the most difficult non-conference game. I’ll say they go 8-4 after losing close conference games.

Who are the two biggest key players for the Cats this season? (one offense, one defense)

Erika: Offensively, Terry Wilson. Without a doubt. In fact, I think a lot of what the Cats do this season rides on Wilson’s success (or lack thereof). We saw him slowly improve over the course of last season and saw glimpses (remember the last few minutes of the Missouri game?) of what he’s capable of, and the Cats are going to have to rely on him to be versatile and help create a balanced offense. On the other side of the ball, Kash Daniel will be the key factor. With so many young players, especially the guys behind him in the secondary, it’ll be up to him to lead the defense and help out the younger guys.

Mohammad: Terry Wilson and Kash Daniel, that’s a no-brainer. As the quarterback, Wilson already naturally bears a lot of responsibility. He’s the one who has to help make sure Eddie Gran’s system comes together. After the Cats’ second scrimmage, Wilson and Mark Stoops both mentioned that Terry has been more comfortable. That’s going to be huge, especially when he’s under pressure and the pocket is collapsing. As for Daniel, he’s got massive shoes to fill on a defense that lost nine defenders, most notably the great Josh Allen. I’d like to see what first-year inside linebackers coach Jon Sumrall draws up for Daniel and the other inexperienced talent around him in the middle.

Chase: The other two are very right, Terry Wilson is THE most important player for the Cats on either side of the ball this season. We know the receiving talent is there, even if it’s young, and we know A.J. Rose can run. For the Cats to succeed, Wilson will have to improve his decision-making, not take so many sacks and calm down while he’s out there. On defense, Chris Oats or Boogie Watson will be the key player (not the best). It’ll be one of their jobs to replace Josh Allen and provide pass rush, which was a key part of the pressure Kentucky applied defensively last season. If they fail, the passing attack will eat UK’s young DBs alive. If they succeed, it’s like Kentucky never missed a step.

Who will be UK’s breakout player?

Erika: Kavosiey Smoke. The Cats’ starting running back will be A.J. Rose, but I thought what we saw from Smoke last year was very promising. He’ll get a lot of reps behind Rose and will definitely turn heads in his sophomore season.

Mohammad: That’s a tough one, but I’m gonna pull a wild card and say Jordan Griffin. Mark Stoops hasn’t named his backfield starters, but there’s no doubt the senior Griffin will be one of them. While he didn’t show much flashiness last season, he played in 12 of 13 games and showed some potential that will be instrumental in replacing the injured Davonte Robinson.

Chase: Justin Rigg. The tight end had his praises sung by all the coaches all summer, and replacing CJ Conrad isn’t exactly easy. In this case, coaches will express confidence but assure media that gameplans might change or they might utilize that spot less. There’s been none of that, and they’re ready to have Rigg in full-force, so I am too.

After losing so many players from last year, which position on the field has the biggest shoes to fill?

Erika: I’m going with the whole secondary (yes, I realize this is more than one position but it’s important). As I mentioned already, this is Kentucky’s weakest spot heading into this season and the coaching staff is putting a lot of trust into younger players to fill the roles.

Mohammad: I’m gonna have to say the “Jack,” a.k.a. the outside linebacker position. Josh Allen is one of those generation-al-type players that don’t come around often, so I’d like to see how Mark Stoops and Brad White help fill that void. Luckily for them though, they are loaded with a depth of young edge rushers and the versatile veteran Jamar “Boogie” Watson by their side.

Chase: Safety. Losing two of their three best tacklers in Mike Edwards and Darius West is going to hurt so badly. I can’t count on all my fingers and toes how many touchdowns they saved, and if you don’t know why big plays are going all the way when they didn’t before, remember this Kernel article.
After a successful 10-3 season and VRBO Citrus Bowl victory last year, a new football season is already on the horizon for the Kentucky Wildcats and head coach Mark Stoops.

The Cats will try to replicate last year’s success after losing 16 seniors and younger players like Benny Snell Jr. Both sides of the ball were dealt formidable blows, particularly the defense who lost standout edge rusher Josh Allen and backfield standouts like Mike Edwards and Lonnie Johnson.

Despite the challenge, the Cats will try to fill those holes with a combination of new, inexperienced players and returning veterans. On a defense that might look relatively different to fans, they should expect a familiar face leading the way.

Senior inside linebacker Kash Daniel will be one of several returners making up for Allen’s and Jordan Jones’ absence. He played in all 13 games last year and finished with 84 tackles, half of them solo tackles, and 7.5 of them for a loss with a sack. Surrounding Daniel will be a handful of returning inside backers like Jamin Davis, Chris Oats and DeAndre Square.

Expect to see senior big men T.J. Carter and Calvin Taylor provide an imposing presence up front. Joining the two from behind will be returning outside linebacker Jamar “Boogie” Watson who made some noise last year with five sacks. Freshman faces like J.J. Weaver, Shawn Kel Knight-Goff and Jared Casey top off the depth.

While the front seems more established, the backfield remains up in the air. After losing five defensive backs to graduation, the team got hit with Davonte Robinson’s season-ending surgery. Stoops has mentioned senior Jordan Griffin having opportunities to step up. New faces like MJ Devinshire and Brandon Eichols alongside returner Tyrell Ajian among others should help fill that big hole.

On the other side of the ball, quarterback Terry Wilson looks to build off last season’s success. Wilson threw for 1,889 yards and 11 touchdowns while completing 67 percent of his passes. He also showed off his legs, rushing for 547 yards and four touchdowns. Behind Wilson will be running backs AJ Rose, Kasvosey Smoke, Chris Rodriguez and Travis Tisdale.

Rose played in all 13 games last season as a junior behind Snell, rushing for 479 yards and five touchdowns. With Rose now looking to fill Snell’s big shoes, the backfield has more room for Smoke and Rodriguez. Smoke saw action in two games while Rodriguez saw just one last season.

Lynn Bowden Jr. is expected to head a deep corps of wideouts after a standout season last year. Bowden finished with 67 receptions, 745 receiving yards and five touchdowns, leading the team in those respective categories. He’ll be joined by inexperienced, returning players like Allen Dailey Jr, Josh Ali, Ahmad Wagner, Isaiah Epps and Bryce Oliver.

On special teams, Max Duffy and Grant McKinnis are expected to handle punts. Chance Poore and Matt Ruffalo will replace Miles Butler at kicker. Bowden will continue to return kicks and punts after returning two punts for touchdowns last year.
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