

NOAH, from 9

Brea has had to do more due to injuries to point guards Lamont Butler, Kerr Kriisa and Jaxson Robinson but Pope said being spurred on that way is not a bad thing. However, he took a step back in the loss at Texas when he went 0-for-6 from the field and had only four points in 35 minutes.

Urgency is now for UK Football

Coming off a 4-8 season, Kentucky coach Mark Stoops didn't mince words about what lies ahead for his program

"You know how tough it is to coach and survive in this league. I've been very proud of the growth and the progress we've made. This last year, we hit a little hiccup, and I'm not very proud of that. We've got a lot of work to do to get us back on track." Stoops said on ESPN. "Our team needs to get bigger, needs to get stronger, mentally tougher."

Stoops, 57, took over at UK in 2013 after coach Joker Phillips went 2-10. Stoops won 10 games in 2018 — something UK had not done since 1977 — and again in 2021.

"Going into my 13th year, what you do realize is the urgency that you know what needs to be done today. There is so much to do. We're attacking it with our players, there's weightlifting, there's the mental toughness, there's the fourth quarter drills coming up," Stoops said.

"But also, with our coaches, like, what are we doing right? How can we continue to build on that? Where do we fall short? How do we get that corrected? There's just a lot to do."

Stoops said he was not

proud of his team's lack of toughness and discipline last year.

"Those are things we gotta get back to, the foundation, the roots of who we are. Be tough, be physical, be accountable to each other," Stoops said.

The problem for Stoops is that UK's 2025 schedule looks even more difficult as the Cats host Texas and Tennessee, playoff teams in 2024, and play at Georgia, another 2024 playoff team. UK hosts Ole Miss and plays at South Carolina, two teams that were close to making the playoffs. The November schedule has games at Auburn, Vanderbilt and Louisville along with a home game with Florida.

Most of Kentucky's 2025 opponents figure to start the season in the AP Top 25.

Pope knows more to success than numbers

Kentucky coach Mark Pope understands that coaching can be about more than numbers. Sometimes the intangibles play a huge role in a team's success.

Pope knows that sometimes coaches have to train/teach players to do more than they believe they are capable of doing.

"I think that great coaches have a magical touch about that. We are a work in progress here," Pope said. "What really makes great coaches is, it's just like great teachers. Great students are probably way more important component of a student-teacher relationship. It's great students, it's students that are hungry and passionate and willing and humble and curious that we talk about all the time."

"And you also get to points in your journey where you might be more

willing and desperate to listen and try a new path, right?"

Maybe that is what has happened at times this year at UK as Pope and his teams have been short-handed since early December due to various injuries.

"I'm going to get really philosophical and that's why it's so fun to coach because the game kind of rips you to pieces and it puts you in a really vulnerable spot and it makes you humble," Pope said. "It makes you willing to try new things and desperately search for answers. And those are really fun students to have."

Former UK All-American Kenny Walker was playing in the NBA when Pope played at Kentucky and helped UK win the 1996 national title.

"I had a chance to work out with him. He was a blue collar worker and maybe worked harder than other more athletic guys on that team. His heart and ability to compete impressed me then," Walker said. "He is a tremendous coach but off the court the way he interacts with fans, guys in the media, he is absolutely unbelievable."

"He played here for Rick Pitino and understands this culture better than any coach here outside of Joe Hall who was born and raised here. No question in the future he has to get better overall talent but the coaching adjustments are terrific. Everything I like about basketball, he does. He gets Kentucky fans will not accept anything less than going out and competing and he gets the very best out of his players."

Cleaver Cats most improved player

Kentucky coach Nick



Mark Stoops knows his team has to be tougher and more disciplined next season. (Photo by Vicky Graff)

Mingione said at his team's Media Day that sophomore left-handed pitcher Ben Cleaver was the returning player off last year's College World Series team that had made the most improvement going into this season.

Mingione backed up that belief by picking Cleaver, who pitched in only 6 1/3 innings in relief in 2024, as one of his three weekend starting pitchers before the season started last week.

"Ben Cleaver has been our guy that if you asked, 'Coach Minge, what returning pitcher's made the biggest jump?' I'd tell

you that It's been Ben Cleaver," Mingione said. "He's throwing the ball as well as anybody right now. Three and four pitches for a strike, so I'm excited to see what he brings and he's going to have a huge role on our team this year."

Quotes of the Week

LSU is number two team in the nation, and we have the potential to have a really good upset. I hope it is sold out because it is a huge opportunity for us," UK senior gymnast Hailey Davis on hosting defending national champion LSU Friday in Memorial Coliseum.

"He plays hard. He accepts the contact. Teams want to be physical with him but he just keeps doing what he does. He leads them with effort. I love what he does," UK Radio Network analyst Jack Givens on junior guard Otega Oweh who has scored in double figures every game this season.

"Whenever he's guarding the ball, the rim protection, you don't really even need it because he can guard one-on-one with anybody. He's really one of the best defenders I've seen," UK freshman Trent Noah on point guard Lamont Butler.



Former UK All-American Kenny Walker likes that Mark Pope was a "blue collar player" who also knows how to interact with players and fans. (Photo by Vicky Graff)

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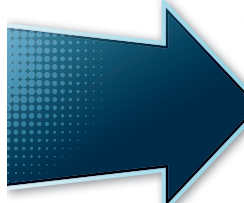
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- Storytime**
Tue. & Wed. • 11 AM
(YOUTH DEPT; 2-5)
- Y.A. Creative Club: Resin Crafts**
Tue. 2/25 • 3:30-5 PM
(TECH AREA LOUNGE; 11-17)
- Caring for Personal Collections**
Tue. 2/25 • 4-5:30 PM
(COMMUNITY ROOM; 18+)
- Setting Financial Goals Interactive Workshop**
Tue. 2/25 • 6 PM | Learn how to improve your financial future with Operation HOPE! Register online. (COMMUNITY ROOM; 18+)
- Kids' Taste Test Challenge**
Wed. 2/26 • 3-4:30 PM
(COMMUNITY ROOM; 6-10)
- Y.A. Super Gaming Guild: Pokémon Party**
Thu. 2/27 • 3:30-5 PM
(COMMUNITY ROOM; 11-17)
- Crochet Club**
Thu. 2/27 • 6 PM
(READING ROOM; 18+)
- Story Center: Farm History Fridays**
Fridays • 10 AM-1 PM | If you have ties to local farming, bring your stories and records (photos, documents, scrapbooks, etc.) to digitize & share your experiences. (GRAYSON'S TAVERN ON CONSTITUTION SQUARE; 18+)
- Caregiver Café** | Fridays • 10:30 AM
(COMMUNITY ROOM; PARENTS & KIDS - AGES 0-5)
- BCPL After Dark: Fairy Teacup Gardens**
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