

# Eva Hudson glad Craig Skinner gave her second chance

**BY LARRY VAUGHT**  
Contributing Writer

Eva Hudson was a top 25 recruit coming out of high school and one of the first college coaches to reach out to her was Kentucky's Craig Skinner. However, she decided to stay in her home state and play for Purdue where she became the Big Ten Freshman of the Year in 2022 and a three-time All-Big Ten selection.

Now Hudson is at Kentucky after transferring and UK fans can have their first chance to see her play Sunday when Kentucky hosts Ohio at Memorial Coliseum.

"I felt like my time at Purdue was coming to a close. One of the things I want to do is get farther in the NCAA Tournament and really just get better and grow as a player," Hudson said when explaining her decision to transfer. "Entering the transfer portal was really a hard decision, probably one of the hardest decisions I have ever made."

"Once I got in there and started talking to Craig I knew this was the place I needed to be. Craig was one of the first people to reach out to me which was nice because in my previous recruiting process he had reached out and I am glad he reached out again."

Hudson, who led the Big Ten with 4.81 kills per set last season, says Purdue was "definitely what I needed" to start her career close to home in Fort Wayne.

"As a senior in high school I was afraid to go as far away from home, not that I am super far away still. I grew up around the Big Ten, so that is one thing I wanted to do, too," she said. "But as the game is changing and all the conferences are becoming really good, I knew that I could branch out."

"I am super, super close with my family. My mom had gone to Purdue and played volleyball. That was a really big deal for me but times change. She was super, super supportive. From the beginning of my recruiting process in high school she said this was my decision and she had no say in it and would support me and she has stayed that way now that I am at Kentucky."

Her mother introduced her to volleyball when soccer was her sport of choice at the time.

"I was really into soccer but I kept growing and she said maybe I should try this volleyball thing," she said. "Both of my parents coached me at one time, my mom in volleyball and my dad in basketball. We have a very athletic family and they wanted us to try everything."

She believes playing soccer and softball helped her eye-hand coordination in volleyball. It also helped develop her stamina and taught her to work with



Purdue transfer Eva Hudson is looking forward to playing with Brooklyn DeLeye at UK. (UK Athletics photo)

new people at a young age.

Something obviously worked because she had double digit kills in 62 of 64 matches she played at Purdue. The 6-1 Hudson led the Big Ten with 567 kills last season and also had 288 digs to help Purdue go 27-7 record with a 16-4 mark in Big Ten play and a Sweet 16 appearance in the NCAA Tournament.

Hudson credits her competitive personality for part of her defensive prowess.

"My mom says when I grit my teeth, then she knows I am here to play. It helps being surrounded by great teammates and wanting to do it for them," the new UK player said.

When Skinner reached out to her about transferring to UK, she knew only two players — Brooklyn DeLeye and Lizzie Carr, who had already transferred from Purdue to UK a few weeks earlier.

"I had a few conversations with Brooklyn DeLeye through USA stuff and knew she was super sweet and an absolute bad ass. The other person I knew was Lizzie. But other than that, I didn't know anyone," Hudson said.

Hudson played with outside hitter Chloe Chicoine, a two-two all-Big Ten pick, at Purdue. Chicoine transferred to Louisville after the season ended.

"I played with Chloe and it was amazing and having someone to push you every day was something I appreciated in her and wanted to do again. Having Brooklyn in the same position doing the same thing is a healthy competition and great competition to make each other better," Hudson said.

Hudson has enjoyed every day life in Lexington. She likes having more food options than West

Lafayette, Ind., offered the last three years. She also has enjoyed the "beautiful weather" and didn't mind the cold, snowy days.

"At Purdue we would be walking to school in 1 degree weather all the time. Here it is 30's more, so we are good. This is nice and not nearly as much snow even when it did snow," she said.

She also likes Memorial Coliseum and is looking forward to her first match in the facility.

"I loved playing at Purdue in the close atmosphere and crazy student section we had. Nebraska, Wisconsin (arenas) are about this big. It doesn't faze me as much to be in a bigger atmosphere and this is a great facility. I cannot wait to see what it is like with UK fans here," she said.

### Livin' the dream

North Laurel's Reed Sheppard played in the 2022 and 2023 state tournaments representing the 13th Region while Trent Noah of Harlan County played in the state tourney in 2024 and reached the championship game.

Several "mountain" teams were in last week's state tournament, including North Laurel, and the Sheppard/Noah impact is still being felt in mountain basketball and apparently will for quite a while.

"Back here in the mountains basketball is king," said Breathitt County coach Jeff Honeycutt. "What they did just adds to the history of sports in the mountains. I watched Richie Farmer, John Pelphrey, The Unforgettables."

"When a mountain does good at the University of Kentucky, people really rally around him. I can't describe the feeling you get from the fanbase. Everybody wants your team to win but if you are

from the mountains you have that identity and the fans love you."

North Laurel coach Nate Valentine knows what Sheppard, who is now in the NBA after being a first-round draft pick, and Noah did by joining the Kentucky basketball program to influence mountain basketball.

"What they have done shows guys there is hope and they can do it. If you want to play in the NBA, put your mind to it and shoot for that and don't let anybody laugh at you," Valentine said. "I said that early to Reed."

"Those guys worked at it. To see those guys improve like they have has

been unbelievable. It's no secret they have God given ability but made the most of it and got in the gym and worked. Every kid who plays at North Laurel thinks they are the next Reed Sheppard and I tell them I hope they are."

He might not be the next Reed Sheppard, but 6-8 junior Reece Davidson of North Laurel — Sheppard's cousin — made a name for himself at the state tourney. He had 41 points on 16-for-22 shooting and 10 rebounds in a quarterfinal loss to Montgomery County after having 35 points and nine rebounds in a first-round win over Breathitt County.

Western Kentucky

coach Hank Plona was in Rupp Arena and saw him play.

### System fits

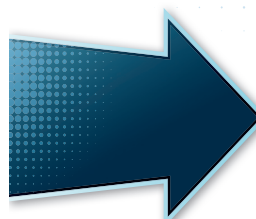
Because Kentucky is "very slanted toward a pro-style" offense with a lot of ball movement it is easier in a lot of ways for coach Mark Pope to find players that fit his system in the best in the transfer portal.

"They actually have the skill sets that translate to what we do. There are some advantages, some real, substantial advantages to recruiting guys out of the portal," Pope said.

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Kentucky freshman Trent Noah has helped inspire other 13th Region players to believe their dreams can come true. (Photo by Vicky Graff)

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