



VICKY GRAFF PHOTO

Kam Williams hit eight 3-pointers against Bellarmine, the first UK player to have that many 3's in a game in five years.

# Williams heats up as confidence returns

By LARRY VAUGHT  
Contributing Writer

He came to Kentucky to provide a 3-point shooting threat for coach Mark Pope after shooting 41 percent from 3 h is freshman season at Tulane. However, 6-foot-8 Kam Williams didn't start the season making shots and realized he was often rushing his shot because he thought the defense was closer to him than it actually was.

Williams lost some of his confidence and even stopped shooting at times, something Pope told him not to do and so did his teammates.

"They all told me to keep my head up and keep shooting," Williams said.

He found other ways to help the team with his defense and rebounding that allowed him to stay on the court even when he was not making shots. He did hit two fast-break 3-pointers in the second half of UK's win over St. John's and then exploded against Bellarmine. He made two 3's in the first half and then made six more in the second half. He finished 8-for-10 from 3-point range and now is shooting 35.4 percent from 3 going into UK's Southeastern Conference opening game at Alabama on Saturday.

Former UK All-American Jack Givens was not surprised by what Williams did. "He's been doing that in practice. He makes shots like that all the time then and I am so happy to see him do it in a game now," Givens said.

The last UK player to hit eight 3-pointers in a game was Immanuel Quickley on Feb. 25, 2020 against Texas A&M. Williams' 80 percent mark from 3-point range tied the single-game record (minimum 10 attempts) previously set by Jamal Murray against Florida on Feb. 6, 2016, when he was 8-for-10 from 3.

Pope thought it was important for Williams to shoot the way he did at Rupp Arena but stressed he never doubted Williams was an elite shooter — one reason he's been mentioned by some NBA mock drafts as a potential 2026 NBA draft pick.

"He's an elite level shooter and it's just his time. That's all it is. Sometimes it's the first day and sometimes it's the 60th day. But when you are a really good shooter, you make shots," the Kentucky coach said.

Williams' father, Greg, was excited about the way his son and teammates played to beat St. John's coming off a win over Indiana to give UK two needed non-conference wins to help its NCAA Tournament resume. He also appreciated the faith Pope showed in his son even when he was not shooting well.

"When a shooter is in a slump, a coach can easily tell him just to stop shooting. But Pope would tell Kam every day to keep shooting no matter what," Greg Williams said. "I have been to many practices and he was making shots. Teammates told him not to dribble after catching a pass and just shoot. I am just hoping this can keep going now and this can be a crazy year for us."

The UK sophomore's father feels his son had been underrated defensively because his 3-point shooting is what he's best known for.

"Shooting is the sexier part of his game

but when you combine that with the defense he can play it is really exciting," Greg Williams said. "You can tell

mentally he is where he wants to be now. I was so proud of him (against St. John's) and you could just see the relief and calmness come over. Now he is free to do exactly what everybody wants him to do and that's knock down shots.

"His best position is at the 3 on the wing and that can give you a really big lineup, especially now that Kam realizes he was trying to shoot too quick instead of just taking his natural shot. He realized he is 6-8 and you are not going to block his shot, so just take time and shoot it and that's what he is doing now."

Greg Williams knows finally having a full roster has helped rejuvenate the team.

"They always had confidence in themselves and always believed but when you do not have all of your weapons it is hard to do everything you want. They were just trying to will their way through some things," the UK sophomore's father said. "Now they can do more of what coach Pope envisioned. In games players were playing different positions than they envisioned but now they all have extra pep in their step because the team is at full strength. Now they are prepared for the gauntlet of SEC play."

Greg Williams heard and saw the speculation earlier this season about players on the team not liking each other that led to team chemistry issues. He never saw that.

"When people say the players did not like each other it was somebody sitting at home and on X (formerly Twitter) knocking players. The players are trying to pull together but yet everybody is coming after them. Some former players who come to practice said playing here can be great but that

BBN is not for everybody and if you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen," Greg Williams said.

"These players want to make BBN proud. My role as a parent is to help my son get through tough times. When BBN was on them and it became personal, that was the only time I had to come in and interact. They are still just kids and this is a journey and it is not easy."

"These kids don't fight each other. They battle on the court during practice but after that they are over playing PlayStation, going to the movies or just relaxing together. They can't really go out anywhere. They are loved and mobbed by fans but on social media they are attacked. They are fighting to win number nine (national championship). BBN just be who you are. The turnout in Atlanta (against St. John's) was crazy. Keep expecting a lot to push the guys because that is the only way to get number nine."

Kam Williams said his big game against Bellarmine made him even more anxious to see what SEC play will be like, especially for home games.

"Having the crowd into it definitely plays a part because the energy that they have makes us play a little harder," Kam Williams said.

# Quaintance boosts UK as SEC play starts

By LARRY VAUGHT  
Contributing Writer

LEXINGTON

Jayden Quaintance's return has rejuvenated the Kentucky fan base as coach Mark Pope's team prepares to open South-eastern Conference play Saturday at Alabama Crimson Tide.

"I feel like we have one of the best big groups in the country," Quaintance said. "All three of us were all-Americans. Nobody else has that. I feel like we have a really good chance to be special, especially in the front court."

Freshman Malachi Moreno and junior Brandon Garrison shared minutes at center through the first 11 games while Quaintance continued his recovery from knee surgery.

The Kentucky sophomore missed more than a year after suffering the injury during his freshman season at Arizona State Sun Devils.

"I feel like we push each other to be better," Quaintance said.

"Getting everybody to talk more, getting everybody more physical, be more aggressive, be more assertive. Just be



UK ATHLETICS PHOTO

Jayden Quaintance (right) likes what he is seeing from freshman teammate Malachi Moreno.

leaders like the front court is supposed to be. I feel like everybody's growing as leaders and bringing that energy to the rest of the team."

Quaintance was among the nation's top freshman defenders and shot blockers at Arizona State and is expected to anchor Kentucky's defense.

He said he has been impressed with Moreno's shot-blocking instincts and competitiveness.

"He's not letting anything go," Quaintance said. "You can tell he just really wants to win. That's a big part of defense, and

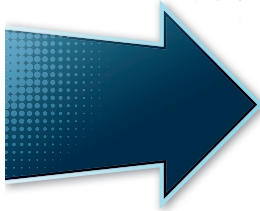
he's super competitive as well."

The Arizona State transfer, projected as a lottery pick in the 2026 NBA draft, has watched Moreno steadily gain confidence and assertiveness in recent months.

"I feel like he's been growing, like you do," Quaintance said. "It's his freshman year, so it's just growing on the college stage, getting more confident, getting more assertive. That's been the biggest thing for him since I got here."



# See What's Taking Shape Locally



Your local newspaper keeps you informed about important local events and community developments. Subscribe today, and stay in the loop!

New Businesses • Real Estate  
Jobs Market • Public Notices  
Local Government  
Community Health  
Dining & Entertainment  
Events & Activities • Local Shopping  
and so much more

The Advocate-Messenger  
YOUR TOWN. YOUR NEWS. 150 YEARS AND COUNTING

Subscribe Today By Phone or Online  
859-236-2551 | www.amnews.com