When will top NBA prospect Jayden Quaintance be ready to play for Kentucky?

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CHET WHITE UK Athletics

Jayden Quaintance takes part in Kentucky basketball practice last week as he continues to work his way back from knee surgery.

Preseason practice is now in full swing for the Kentucky Wildcats, but the most celebrated player on Mark Pope's second UK basketball roster remains relegated to the sidelines.

Jayden Quaintance, a 6-foot-10 sophomore who's projected to be a lottery pick in the 2026 NBA draft, is still working his way back from a serious knee injury sustained earlier this year and has not yet joined his Kentucky teammates in a full capacity.

Quaintance, who was a freshman at Arizona State last season, suffered a torn ACL in February and underwent surgery for the injury March 19.

He later committed to UK out of the transfer portal — Quaintance had originally signed with the Cats as a high school recruit, when John Calipari was the program's head coach — and immediately became the marquee name in Pope's incoming transfer class, even though it was known at the time that he could miss some of the 2025-26 season as he recovered from the injury.

At the time of his commitment, there was optimism within Quaintance's camp that he would be cleared for contact by the start of fall practice and ready to play in UK's season opener, which will come against Nicholls in Rupp Arena on Nov. 4.

That timetable was viewed as ambitious, and a return from a torn ACL that quickly — for a player who's projected to have a long NBA career ahead of him — has been met with skepticism over the past few months. Pope acknowledged over the summer that Quaintance was unlikely to be ready to play for Kentucky at the start of the regular season. The Herald-Leader has been told that he might not be ready to play in games until January.

Pope addressed the situation again at the team's media day Monday, saying that Quaintance is "breaking every record known to humankind in terms of his rehab. It's unbelievable," but not offering a timetable for the sophomore's return.

Four or five weeks ago, Pope said, Quaintance's leg tested at 3% asymetry, down from 46% — a number Pope said was "fully expected" — earlier in his rehab. That's a measure of the strength of Quitance's surgically repaired knee, and Pope said data indicated that Quaintance is 20% stronger in his full leg function than the average NBA player of the same size and body type.

Still, Pope didn't pinpoint a time for Quaintance's return.

"Time-wise, he's just going so fast, but we're going to proceed with extreme caution," Pope said. "... As fast as he's recovering, there's a balance that we're trying to strike where he's got an incredible, incredible future in this game, and we're gonna make sure he gets every opportunity to help this team be great and also have an opportunity to go on and do all the great things he's gonna do after Kentucky."

Quaintance was a McDonald's All-American recruit out of high school, with 247Sports ranking him as the No. 9 overall prospect in the 2024 class. That recruiting service also ranked him as the No. 10 overall transfer in college basketball this past offseason, tops among all of UK's newcomers.

Despite playing the entire 2024-25 season at 17 years old, Quaintance averaged 9.4 points, 7.9 rebounds and 2.6 blocks in 29.5 minutes per game. Even though his season was cut short due to injury, he was named to the Big 12's All-Freshman team and the league's All-Defensive team.

Quaintance is widely viewed as one of the top prospects in the 2026 draft. ESPN projected him as the No. 6 overall pick in its summer mock draft. A more recent mock draft from Bleacher Report had Quaintance at No. 4 overall in 2026.

Jaland Lowe, who is expected to be UK's starting point guard this season, played up expectations while talking about Quaintance's ability in an interview with the Herald-Leader last month.

"We're going to be the best team in the country, without a doubt, with him coming back," Lowe said. "He's somebody that's just a game changer, in every aspect."

With Quaintance sidelined, returning junior big man Brandon Garrison is expected to be the team's starter at the 5 for the beginning of the regular season, and Garrison could hold on to that role even after Quaintance returns to the lineup.

McDonald's All-American freshman center Malachi Moreno is also expected to get meaningful opportunities at the beginning of the season. And 7-1 transfer Reece Potter, a Lexington native who spent the past two seasons at Miami (Ohio), could also factor into Pope's plans in the middle.

Kentucky's first big game of the season will come on Nov. 11 at Louisville, with the Champions Classic matchup at Michigan State set for Nov. 18.

Other milestones in the nonconference portion of the 2025-26 schedule include games against North Carolina (Dec. 2), Gonzaga (Dec. 5), Indiana (Dec. 13) and St. John's (Dec. 20).

UK will begin SEC play at Alabama on Jan. 3.

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As the most talented player on a limited Pitt roster, Lowe was a high-volume shooter (442 shot attempts) who shot 37.6% on field-goal tries and a chilly 26.6% on 3-point attempts.

In assessing Lowe, Pope said the UK brain trust applied a "functional shot-quality metric" that evaluated the quality of shots Lowe took in 2024-25 in comparison to what the "average college basketball player" would take.

"One of the interesting things about Jaland was, for whatever reason, last year, he was in the 95th, 93rd percentile (among) players in the country taking shots (but) in the bottom 20% of 'shot quality' numbers," Pope said.

Counterintuitively, Pope said the Kentucky staff is attracted to otherwise talented players whose low shooting percentages seem to stem from shot selection.

"We love when we see things like that, because those are things that (fixing) it doesn't depend on increased skill," Pope said. "It doesn't depend on hours and hours in the gym. It just relies on a new understanding, a new style of play, maybe a new environment, a new way for 'J Lo' to approach the game."

Lowe expressed enthusiasm for playing in a different manner than he had to do last season for Pitt.

"I don't want to be out there taking a lot of hard shots. That's not who I am," Lowe said. "I don't want to have to carry such a heavy load of having to shoot hard shots. I'd love to shoot a lot of easy ones and then help my teammates out at (doing) the same."

It was not lost on Lowe that Butler came into Pope's offensive system after being a defense-first guard for San Diego State for four seasons and raised his field-goal percentage by 7.7 % (42.1 to 49.) and his 3-point percentage by 8.9% (30.2 to 39.1) year-to-year while averaging a career-high 11.4 points a game.

"That was a huge pitch," Lowe said. "And that's a huge reason why I chose here."

Pope said there is much about Lowe's game — finishing ability, fearless nature, capacity to get wherever he wants on the court with the ball whenever he wants to be there — that should "translate well to him being a more efficient player."

Overall, Pope said of Lowe "We have big-time expectations."

Along with greater offensive efficiency, Lowe sees his primary role as Kentucky point guard as becoming a player his new teammates are willing to follow.

"His leadership is amazing," said incoming Kentucky guard and 2025 Florida Gators NCAA champion Denzel Aberdeen. "(Lowe) pushes me each and every day in practice to get me to my best. So I'm very thankful for him."

As for the pressure that may come from seeking to live up to the legacy left by the ghosts of Kentucky's "elite point guards past," Lowe plans to embrace it.

"I'm more than glad to be here to take on this pressure to try and be a great point guard, like the past point guards have been," he said.

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BASKETBALL

team I've ever had in my 25 years of coaching, and I think we're going to be able to use that to our advantage. Obviously, we may not be the quickest team, but last year, we led the country in blocked shots. And I think we have the catalyst to still do that again with Teonni Key and Clara Strack holding down the middle. But they're very tall and they're long, and so we're looking forward to using that to our advantage."

The kingpin, however, is how impressed Brooks has found himself with his trio of returning starters — Strack, Key and Hassett —who not only have every intention of continuing last year's success but also have grown into leadership roles to ensure the culture carries over.

"The returners' attitude has been very infectious to the newcomers," Brooks said. "'Hey, this is how we do it.' So I've been very proud of that."

Hassett, who transferred to UK ahead of last season after two seasons at Eastern Florida and earning 2023-24 National Junior College Athletic Association Division I All-America Third Team honors, was brought in to be a hardworking sharpshooter but quickly proved her potential exceeded that.

In 31 games with the Wildcats last year, Hassett averaged 8.6 points, 7.9 rebounds, 1.9 assists, 1.3 blocks and 0.9 steals.

The Aussie shone brightly during UK's nonconference slate but faded into the background as the season evolved into stiffer competition in SEC play. Hassett's contributions shifted to more of what the team needed from her amid a lack of depth, and often that was guarding the opponents' toughest players or reinforcing the dominance of the post group.

This season, Brooks said the even-taller Hassett is "playing out of her mind."

"The one that you guys really need to watch out for is Amelia," Brooks said. "And Amelia has walked into the room, she bust down the door like, 'Here I am.' And she's got the green light. She's shooting the ball exceptionally well."

Key, who struggled with confidence down the stretch last season, spent the summer working on her game *and* her self-perception.

The dynamic forward received minimal playing time across two active seasons at her previous stop — North Carolina — but exploded onto the scene in her first year at UK with 12 double-doubles during her junior season. She averaged 11.4 points, 8.3 rebounds, 1.7 blocks and 1.7 assists, and her presence on the court was indispensable. Brooks often refers to her as "the key" to her team's success.

"She's put in so much work to expand her game," Brooks said. "To fine-tune her game, to be confident in some of the things that that she hasn't done well. And because of that, and because of her work ethic, we've kind of given her carte blanche. 'Just go, just play. You make a mistake, that's on me. You make another mistake, it's on the other coach.'"

Key was so important, in fact, that any time her confidence wavered, the team lacked its typical cohesion. Brooks is proud of her skill set and the work she's put in to improve it, but he's also impressed by her charisma; he half-joked that Key will run for President somewhere down the line due to her "striking" personality.

"We want her to just play with confidence, because when she does, so many wonderful things can happen," Brooks said. "And when she's playing like that, and it gives us an opportunity to beat anyone, and we want to give her that opportunity to grow, because we think that (we) will benefit from it, that she'll benefit from it. And no question in my mind that she's going to have a year that's really going to be one that's going to be impacted not just by her play, but by her leadership."

Strack, who also earned All-SEC Second Team honors during her first full season as a Power Four starter, inherits the responsibility shouldered most often last season by Amoore — the assumed production leader and the player that every opposing coach will plan hard to stop.

"Now, what she has to be ready for is that she's not going to sneak up on anyone," Brooks said. "She's going to be the focal point of everyone's scouting report, and I think that she's ready for that, and she's had a phenomenal summer."

At only 19 years old, Strack earned a spot as a top-10 finalist for the Lisa Leslie Center of the Year Award, and anchored the Wildcats' defense despite spending the majority of her freshman season learning from Virginia Tech great Liz Kitley the year prior.

With the Wildcats, Strack averaged a near-double-double with 15.4 points and 9.7 rebounds per game. She also contributed 2.5 assists (Brooks calls her the best-passing post player in the country), 2.4 blocks and 0.8 steals. The Buffalo native broke UK's single-season records in both total blocks (73) and blocks per game, but Brooks' opinion is that her best basketball has yet to be seen.

"The beauty is, I think she's challenging me," he said. "And I always tell them, if they want to be great, you have to meet me halfway. And this kid, she's done everything that I've asked her to do in a short amount of time. And even though we put so much pressure on her, and rightfully so because she deserves it, she's earned it."

Brooks admitted that sometimes he has to remind himself of Strack's youth, but he deeply respects how the junior challenges him as a coach, asking him daily for extra workouts and extra shots.

"I don't ever have to ask her," Brooks said. "And she's really compliant in that because she wants to be great. She's a fierce competitor ... her attitude is infectious, and she's becoming one of our leaders on the team. And that's something that I never would have considered maybe a year ago, and that's just how far she's grown as a person and a player."

Now just a few weeks into practices, Brooks said the team is "still learning each other," and that, because of that, "we still have some ways to go." But he and his staff aren't too concerned about chemistry, particularly due to his trio stepping into new-and-improved versions of themselves.

"Once they continue with the chemistry part of it," Brooks said, "and they start holding each other accountable, I think their attitude will become more infectious, and they'll have a little bit more of a swagger."

Legals

Legals & Public Notices

NOTICE OF SALE

Pursuant to K.R.S. 376.400, notice is hereby given that Stone Columns Stables, Inc. will on Wednesday, October 15, 2025, at the hour of 10:00 a.m. at Stone Columns Stables, Inc., 5222 Paris Pike, Lexington, Kentucky 40511, expose to public sale the following animals to satisfy the charges for board and keeping thereon, to the highest and best bidder: Thoroughbred mare BONNIE'S THE BEST (2018) by DISTORTED HUMOR out of QUEEN DAENERYS, presently in foal to FULSOME and the 2024 Thoroughbred colt by CORE BELIEFS out of BONNIE'S THE BEST. Terms are cash at the time of sale.

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Legals

Legals & Public Notices

SUMMARY OF BOND RESOLUTION AND NOTICE OF ADOPTION

The Kentucky Bond Development Corporation, at a meeting held on October 7, 2025, adopted the following bond resolution:

A RESOLUTION OF THE KENTUCKY BOND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF APPROXIMATELY $3,100,000 PRINCIPAL AMOUNT OF KENTUCKY BOND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES REVENUE BONDS, CITY OF WOODLAWN SERIES 2025A (THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF COVINGTON PROJECT), THE PROCEEDS OF WHICH SHALL BE LOANED TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF COVINGTON, KENTUCKY TO FINANCE THE ACQUISITION, CONSTRUCTION, ENLARGEMENT, REMODELING, RENOVATION, IMPROVEMENT, FURNISHING, OR EQUIPPING OF FACILITIES SUITABLE FOR USE IN FURTHERANCE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF COVINGTON, KENTUCKY; PROVIDING FOR THE PLEDGE OF REVENUES FOR THE PAYMENT OF SUCH BONDS; AUTHORIZING A LOAN AGREEMENT APPROPRIATE FOR THE PROTECTION AND DISPOSITION OF SUCH REVENUES AND TO FURTHER SECURE SUCH BONDS; AUTHORIZING A TRUST INDENTURE, BOND PURCHASE AGREEMENT, TAX EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE AND AGREEMENT; AND AUTHORIZING OTHER ACTIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE ISSUANCE OF SUCH BONDS.

The Resolution authorizes the issuance by the Kentucky Bond Development Corporation (the "Issuer") of approximately $3,100,000 of the Issuer's Educational Facilities Revenue Bonds, City of Woodlawn Series 2025A (Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington Project) (the "Bonds") in one or more series to provide funds to make a loan to The Most Reverend John Curtis Iffert, Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, his successors and assigns (collectively, the "Borrower"), the proceeds of which will be used by the Borrower ") to finance the costs of the acquisition, construction, enlargement, remodeling, renovation, improvement, furnishing, or equipping of educational, athletic, and related facilities at Newport Central Catholic High School, located at 13 Carothers Road, Newport, Kentucky. The Bonds are being issued under Chapter 103 of the Kentucky Revised Statutes, and are to be retired from the loan payments to be made under a loan agreement between the Issuer and the Borrower (the "Loan Agreement"). The Bonds are not general obligations of the Issuer but are special and limited obligations of the Issuer payable solely from the revenues and funds pledged therefor under the Loan Agreement securing the Bonds. The Bonds will not be payable from other revenues or assets of the Issuer and neither the faith and credit nor the taxing power of the Commonwealth of Kentucky or any of its agencies or political subdivisions is pledged to the payment of any of the Bonds.

Interest on the Bonds will be determined as set forth in (i) the Loan Agreement, (ii) an amended and restated trust indenture and indenture supplemental thereto, each by and between the Borrower and U.S. Bank Trust Company, National Association, as trustee, and (iii) a purchase agreement, by and between the Issuer, the Borrower, and the purchasers of the Bonds. The Resolution also authorizes the execution on behalf of the Issuer of various financing documents involved in the transaction, including the foregoing documents, a Tax Regulatory Agreement and Certificate, and related bond documents. A copy of the Resolution and the forms of the financing documents described above are on file with the Secretary of the Issuer.

KENTUCKY BOND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
By: /s/ Robyn Miller
Secretary

PREPARATION CERTIFICATE

The undersigned Attorney at Law, licensed to practice in Kentucky, hereby certifies that the foregoing Summary of Bond Resolution and Notice of Adoption of the Kentucky Bond Development Corporation was prepared by the undersigned and constitutes a general summary of essential provisions of the Resolution, reference to the full text of which resolution is hereby made for a complete statement of its provisions and terms.

/s/ Mark S. Franklin
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Oct 8 2025