

Danville falls to West Jessamine in regional baseball final

By Mike Marsee
Contributing Writer

Nobody wants to end their season in right field.

After the final out of a tournament, when the winners have taken over the infield for photos in their championship T-shirts, hugs with their families and ice dumps for their coach, the losers are relegated to a lonely spot in the outfield for the postgame meeting every player dreads.

That's where Danville ended up Thursday night after its loss in the 12th Region Tournament final.

The Admirals took up residence in right field to talk it out, hug it out and maybe even cry a little after their season ended with a 3-1 loss to West Jessamine in Liberty.

And while Danville coach C.J. Lynn didn't like that location, he said what the Admirals accomplished to reach the title game was gratifying.

"I'm super proud of them," Lynn said. "The last three months, it's been a good season. We've had a good ride. These guys, the last two weeks, really came together and played well. They fought hard."

Danville defeated Rockcastle County and Mercer County in the first two rounds to reach the regional final for the first time in four years, the most significant step yet in the rebuilding of a program that missed the regional for three straight years after winning consecutive titles in 2021 and 2022.

Lynn said the team's six seniors had much to do with the Admirals getting the chance to compete for a championship again.

"The seniors didn't want to give up, and it showed, and they did what they needed to do to get to the spot where a lot of people didn't think we would be," he said. "We knew we would have a chance, but getting here was part of the battle."

"You always hope for the best, to be one pitch away, one play away, whatever it might be, and you're right there in the game. Even in the seventh inning, we were right there."

But Danville (23-14) couldn't take advantage of its opportu-



Danville pitcher Wyatt Gale delivers a pitch during the second inning of the 12th Region baseball championship game.

MIKE MARSEE

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C.J. Lynn

Danville baseball coach

nities in the title game, stranding nine runners and going 0-for-4 with runners in scoring position over the final four innings.

West Jessamine (20-19) broke a 1-all tie in the fifth inning with a two-run home run by Hayden Brock, who drove in all three of the Colts' runs.

Brock hit a bomb that cleared the temporary fence in center field at the spacious Durham-Mays Field, the Casey County turf field where the regional was relocated after Rockcastle County's field became waterlogged following several days of rain.

West went over .500 for the first time since it was 2-1 as it reached the top of the 12th Region for the second time in three years.

"It's been a talented group all year. We've just kind of been up

and down with some consistency, and so you just keep coaching them ... and preaching the right stuff," West coach Austin Kearns said. "They're good kids, they're talented and they're seeing the benefit of some hard work and sticking together."

Danville got four hits in the first three innings off Colts starter Jordan Head and scored its only run when Wyatt Gale singled home Dillon Cruver in the third.

But the Admirals couldn't get a hit off relievers Brandt Kidwell, Gage Struble and Kaden Floyd. Kidwell pitched three shutout innings, and Struble and Floyd combined to get the final three outs after Cruver walked to lead off the seventh inning.

"That's baseball," Lynn said. "It's never easy to swallow when you lose. It always leaves a bad taste in your mouth, but you've

got to get up tomorrow, put your pants on and go to work, and that's all you can do."

Brock singled to drive in Kellen Dziki with the game's first run in the top of the third inning, then delivered the deciding blow with one out in the fifth off Gale, who started on the mound for Danville despite not having thrown a pitch all season.

Gale, an Army West Point signee who excelled as the Admirals' catcher and had pitching experience from previous seasons, got the ball because the team's top three pitchers were unavailable due to pitch count restrictions or injury.

Nathan Doyle pitched the final 2 2/3 innings, allowing four hits but keeping the Admirals in the game by preventing the Colts from adding on runs.

Danville posted a second straight 20-win season that included wins over two teams that were in the top 15 in the final statewide ranking, as well as a 16-3 loss to West on May 2.

Lynn, who also lost a regional title game to West in 2015 as Garrard County's coach, said the Admirals gained confidence over the course of the season that

served them well in the post-season.

"We got more and more fight in us. We never wanted to quit," he said. "We came together as a team throughout the season."

He said he'll remember the seniors for the hard work they put in to give themselves a shot at a championship.

"We put in the work to be where we were at to end this season ... and it was hard work. They bowed their necks and they got here," Lynn said. "It gives these younger guys a chance to see where we started, where we ended."

"You don't want it to end here, but all good things come to an end at some point, whether you win or you don't. ... We have a lot of work to do to get back where we need to be, and we'll continue to work."

AREA PLAYERS ON THE ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM:

Danville — Noah Cross, Hayden Foster, Wyatt Gale
Boyle County — Kyler Claunch, Caeden Patterson
Mercer County — Carter Devine, Ayden Stephens

Who is Ousmane N'Diaye and just how good is he?

By Larry Vaught
Contributing Writer

Scout says N'Diaye could provide Kentucky with shooting, defensive versatility

Ousmane N'Diaye is a 6-foot-11, 210-pound forward from Senegal who has played in professional leagues in Germany, Italy and Spain.

He spent his most recent season at Vanoli Cremona, which competes in Italy's top division — the same league where former Kentucky players Kyle Wiltjer and Nate Sestina play.

Ersin Demir is an international basketball scout who has compiled more than 350 in-depth scouting reports on international players, including one on N'Diaye in 2025. N'Diaye has also played for the Senegalese national team from 2023-26.

Demir calls N'Diaye a "tantalizing athlete with tremendous speed and quickness" who uses his fluid hips and mobility to create advantages on the perimeter.

"The lack of field goal attempts at the rim was surprising. However, after I wrote my in-depth piece on him, I understood



Ousmane N'Diaye brings international experience, perimeter shooting and defensive versatility to Kentucky after playing professionally in Germany, Italy and Spain.

FIBA PHOTO

much better that his game is built on creating angles in closeouts whereas his movement away from the ball mostly has him play as a shooter," Demir said. "He's not tough or physical, but shows good feel for positioning as a rebounder, giving him value on the defensive end alongside playing as a help-side shot-blocker.

"Due to the non-existing defensive three-second rule in the FIBA rulebook, primary fives are paint presences, which naturally left N'Diaye being

relieved on those duties. But he'll very much be in the paint for Kentucky to be a second rim protector alongside Malachi Moreno."

N'Diaye has "NBA range" with his shot, and 135 of his 245 field goal attempts last season were 3-pointers. Despite being 6-foot-11, he had only 29 free throw attempts.

"His game is built on shooting, and that's where I don't see him taking a leap to be a star in college. I've been talking to a couple of Kentucky people, and

warned them to not overrate him or expect too much," Demir said. "He's a primary floor-spacer who'll benefit from the gravity of shooters around him."

"It's not a bad thing by any means, as (Mark) Pope tries to play a game where he's maximizing his number of 3s — at least he should with Moreno as his primary paint presence — while focusing on playing four out as much as possible."

Demir said N'Diaye, 22, will need time to adjust to rougher, more physical play, especially against Southeastern Conference teams.

"The European game is built on fundamentals rather than relying on athleticism or physicality. That's been the negative in his profile in terms of his NBA future. It's been a few years, and at Baskonia in Spain he didn't play much," Demir said. "When transferring to Cremona in Italy this last summer, he has gotten quality minutes, rewarding his efforts with a 9.6 points and 6.9 rebounds per game season."

"Considering most games in Europe finish around 75 points per game, that's a decent chunk

of the production he took on himself as a shooting-heavy skill four."

Even with the return of Moreno, Kentucky still needs a "star" presence on its 2026 roster. Could N'Diaye be that player?

"That's unfair. He's a good starter if he adjusts to life in Lexington and the SEC's physicality," Demir said.

His strength for Kentucky could be on defense.

"He's a switchable quick defender. Good hands. At a steal and 0.6 blocks per game (last season), he's getting his fair share of stocks while he's proven to be a good team defender with consistent rotations, managing to keep quicker and smaller scorers in front of him," Demir said. "I expect him to flourish against motion offenses or when teams try to switch against him and pressure the paint."

However, Demir does not project N'Diaye as a star player or an NBA first-round draft pick.

Readers can subscribe to Demir's newsletter, which covers the NBA Draft and Division college basketball recruitment at edemirnba.substack.com or subscribe.