



Out of the Blue

Notebook

Pope hopeful Williams can return to court

By KEITH TAYLOR
Kentucky Today

LEXINGTON (KT) — Kentucky guard Kam Williams could return to the lineup sooner rather than later.

Williams has missed the past seven games after breaking his foot in an 85-80 win over Texas on Jan. 21. Kentucky coach Mark Pope said Williams is progressing well in the recovery process on Thursday, ahead of the team's contest at Auburn on Saturday.

"We're optimistic, because we're always optimistic," Pope said. "The timeline is tight, and I don't know how much has been publicly talked about the specifics of his injury. Yes, I've been really vague, right?"

"But, here's a real chance that at some point, if we extend the season out long enough that (he could) come back and help us, and we're excited for that to happen."

Williams was averaging 6.9 points per game before the injury and had become part of the team's starting rotation. Pope said Williams had earned his spot at the time after a slow start earlier this season.

"I harken back to games early in the season where he didn't really play at all in the first half, then got some minutes the second half, and he'd been unbelievable on the bench, like full of enthusiasm, and then came into the game and had a huge impact," Pope recalled.

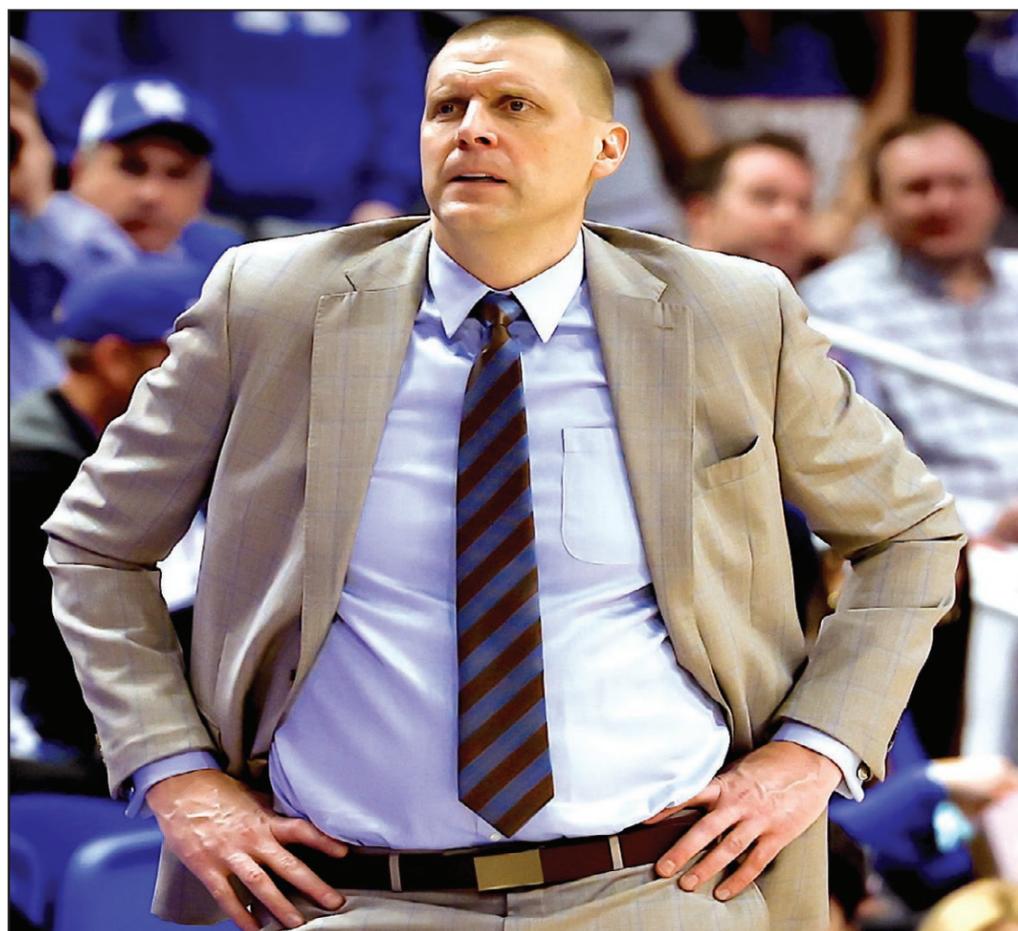
"That's how he earned himself a starting spot and why he grew so much."

JQ still hobbling

The Kentucky coach wasn't as optimistic about Jayden Quaintance, who has missed the past 11 games because of swelling in his foot. Pope's update on the sophomore forward was similar to last week's update.

"Right now he's not ready, and we're not gonna roll him out there until he's 100 percent and he's a ways from that," he said. "We haven't incorporated him back into practice and so that's complicated. I don't know how optimistic I am about that."

"Like I said, he's making great progress, but just so you know, with a guy as explosive as he is, he's got to be 100 percent ready and so we're working slowly (with him)."



Kentucky coach Mark Pope watches from the sidelines during Kentucky's 86-78 loss to Georgia on Feb. 17 at Rupp Arena. The Wildcats began the week with a rare three-game losing streak. (Les Nicholson photo)

Cats scraping UK in need of wins ... fast

Kentucky is trending in reverse following three straight setbacks for the first time since cardboard fans and fake noise filled the stands in the forgettable 2020-21 season.

Coach Mark Pope probably wishes he could block out the noise of negativity that filtered through social media after the Wildcats dropped a 75-74 decision to Auburn last Saturday, a contest that featured a controversial finish down the stretch.

The Tigers connected on the game-winning basket on an offensive putback with 1.2 seconds after Collin Chandler was called for an offensive foul for allegedly pushing off on an inbounds play. The late call was a hot topic in Pope's postgame press conference.

"We're not allowed to talk about the referees," Pope said. "You guys saw it and I think sometimes it's just super personal, so I'm not allowed to comment on the referees. I won't comment on the referees. It's just unfortunate. It didn't cost us the game. We're in control of the game and so (we need to) find ways to win."

The team's locker room following the loss, Pope said, was one filled with anger instead of disappointment.

"We refuse to give control to people who are outside of

our program," he said. "(We) refuse, regardless of how personal it might get or how bad it might get. We refuse to give control to anybody else associated with this game, regardless of how blatantly people are trying to make this not happen. We refuse to give them our power. That's what I talked about."

The players were also realistic and didn't place total blame for the loss on the officials.

"Multiple times we could have won it," said Otega Oweh, who scored a career-high 29 points against the Tigers. "... (we) got a bad whistle at that end. We (were) playing physically the whole game and (they called) a push off. ... We (tried) to create space. It's an unfortunate call but, even with that, we still could have won."

Kentucky, which opened the week 17-10 and 8-6 in the Southeastern Conference, has four games remaining in the regular season. It's a two-week stretch that began with a road game at league cellar-dweller South Carolina, followed

by a home rematch against Vanderbilt, a road game at Texas A&M and the home finale against conference leader Florida.

"We have 48 hours to turn this around," Pope said. "We've got a massive game at South Carolina. We're going to go find a way to win it, because that's what we do. We're not giving away our power. We don't make excuses. We don't do that regardless of what is happening, regardless of how disgraceful things are. We don't give away our power, regardless of how embarrassing, personal, awful and unacceptable things are. We refuse to give away our power."

Despite the recent setbacks, the Wildcats have shown they're capable of turning things around amid the struggles.

Kentucky won eight of nine games after a blowout loss at Vanderbilt in January and won five in a row after two straight setbacks to open the SEC campaign.

"We're coming to compete," Pope warned future opponents. "We're a little short-handed right now, but we have control over winning and losing ... we're not sitting here trying to consider nonsense. We're trying to win games."



Keith Taylor



Basketball Schedule

January

21
Texas • W • 85-80

24
Ole Miss • W • 72-63

27
@ Vandy • L • 80-55

31
@ Arkansas • W • 85-77

February

4
Oklahoma • Won • 94-78

7
Tennessee • Won • 74-71

14
@ Florida • Lost • 92-83

17
Georgia • Lost • 86-78

21
@ Auburn • Lost • 75-74

24
@ South Carolina • 7 p.m. • SECN

28
Vanderbilt • 2 p.m. • ESPN

March

3
@ Texas A&M • 3 p.m. • ABC

7
Florida • 4 p.m. • ESPN

11-15

SEC Tournament • Nashville

Football

April 18
Blue-White Game • Kroger Field

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