

Resilient West reigns as 12th Region champion

By Mike Marsee
Contributing Writer

LIBERTY, Ky. — West Jessamine's resume might not jump off the page, but their resilience certainly should.

A season of streaks will end at the state tournament after the Colts strung together the wins that mattered most last week to capture the 12th Region championship.

They found the formula for success they had been looking for in a three-game stand in the regional tournament at Casey County that was capped Thursday by their 3-1 victory over Danville in the title game.

"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."

West (20-19) won its sixth 12th Region title and its second in three years, returning to the top of the region after losing in the finals last season.

The Colts will face 9th Region champion Beechwood at 8:30 p.m. Friday in the first round of the KHSAA State Baseball Tournament at Legends Field in Lexington.

They will have the lowest win total of any team in the state tournament, as winning the regional final raised their record above .500 for the first time since they were 2-1.

But they will have the lessons learned and the toughness gained over the course of this season that allowed them to survive close games in the regional semifinals and finals.

"It's just staying consistent and not getting down whenever they get some base hits or they get a rally together," shortstop Hayden Brock said. "You really just try to keep your energy up. You've got to know that you're the better team and you've got to fight through it."



West Jessamine players celebrate with the 12th Region championship trophy after defeating Danville 3-1 at Casey County's Durham-Mays Field in Liberty.

Brock delivered the big blow in the title game against Danville, launching a two-run home run to center field in the fifth inning that broke a 1-all tie.

He hit a one-out 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 after several days of rain.

"As soon as I saw it hit my bat, I kind of knew it was leaving here," Brock said. "Yeah, I got it pretty solid. I just did it for my boys, for the team."

It was the second home run of the season for Brock, the leadoff hitter who drove in all three of the Colts' runs.

"He's a talented kid, and he's got a bright future," Kearns said. "He had some really good at-bats today and was on the barrel, and he got a hanging breaking ball in the fifth and didn't miss it."

Brock, Jordan Head and Kellen Dziki had two hits each for West, which had 11 hits in the final and 25 in its three regional games.

"We started off the season not hitting great, but we've come together as a team. We put hits together when we need to," Brock said.

Dziki led off the third inning with a single and scored the game's first run on a one-out

single by Brock.

Danville (23-14) tied the game in the bottom of the third when Wyatt Gale singled home Dillon Cruver.

But the Admirals couldn't get a hit off relievers Brandt Kidwell, Gage Struble and Kaden Floyd. Kidwell pitched three shutout innings in relief of starter Jordan Head, who allowed four hits over three innings, and Struble and Floyd combined to get the final three outs after Cruver walked to lead off the seventh inning.

"Jordan did great, gave us three good innings, and then Brandt came in and bridged it to the end, and, man, you just can't say enough about the effort of these guys," Kearns said.

Brock, Jacob Cissell, Tyler Giles and Lucas Poor were named to the all-tournament team.

West lost six of its first seven games and was 6-10 after spring break. The Colts lost to Mercer County in 11 innings in the 46th District final but bounced back to win the region as a district runner-up just as they had in 2024.

Brock drove in three runs and Braxton Frankenburger, Drew Hardin and Eli Scott had two RBIs each in West's 11-5 win over Southwestern in the first round of the tournament. Jacob Cissell and Kaden Floyd combined to throw a two-hit shutout

as the Colts edged No. 8 Boyle County 2-0 in the semifinals.

"Kids are growing up a little bit right in front of us," Kearns said. "We knew it was going to be a bunch of dogfights this week, and they kept on grinding away at it."

No. 11 Beechwood (32-9), West's opponent in the first round of the state tournament, won the 9th Region for the eighth time overall and the first time since it won four straight titles from 2019-23. The 2020 season was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Tigers have won 12 of their last 13 games and outscored their three regional opponents 19-2 behind complete games by pitchers Paul Stephenson, Caleb Arrasmith and Sawyer Carlisle.

"Preseason No. 1 and everything else, I just think the target on our back was really big and I knew it was going to be tough, but just resilient," Beechwood coach Kevin Gray said. "This team is just resilient, worked their butts off. When we're done practicing, they're not. They always stayed and worked on things in the barn or whatever. So it's just a resilient group."

If West advances, it will play No. 1 Trinity or Bullitt East in the quarterfinals at 8:30 p.m. Saturday.

Kentucky lands top transfer Milan Momcilovic

By Keith Taylor
Kentucky Today

LEXINGTON, Ky. (KT) — Kentucky got its man, finally.

Milan Momcilovic, the top available player remaining in the portal, chose UK over Louisville and Arizona on Monday night, according to multiple sources.

The 6-foot-8 Momcilovic played for Iowa State last season where he led college basketball in three-pointing shooting with a 48.7 percentage on 7.5 attempts per game. His coming vaults UK back into the position of national contender under Mark Pope, who enters season three as the head coach.

Momcilovic told the Lexington Herald-Leader last month that Kentucky would be in the mix for his talents.

"I think Kentucky would be a good fit," Momcilovic told the newspaper. "I obviously went against Pope at BYU his first year (in the Big 12), and I loved how his team played. I think we went 1-1 against them, but they killed us at their place, because they fly the ball up the court and shoot 3s. I really like the way they play."

Momcilovic's style fits Kentucky perfectly with his ability to shoot from beyond the perimeter.

"Kentucky last year, he didn't have enough shooters around him to really coach, I feel like, the way he wanted," he said at the time. "But I think — if I were to choose Kentucky — that would be a good fit for me. I feel like I'd be a great player for him, and he'd be a good coach for me."

He went through the NBA Combine but eventually pulled out of the NBA Draft late last Wednesday. Since then UK fans — and others — have been on edge about when he was going to make his college choice. It finally came Monday night and Big Blue Nation could finally exhale.

Momcilovic, who is from Pewaukee, Wisconsin, scored 1,349 points over his three years at Iowa State. He averaged 16.9 points per game last season.

Kentucky's season ended with a loss to Momcilovic's Iowa State team in the second round of the NCAA tournament. The Wildcats were 22-14 after starting the season ranked ninth in the AP Top 25.

Iowa State coach T.J. Otzelberger said he had no hard feelings regarding Momcilovic's future choices last month.

"I love Milan. Like, he's my guy," he said. "Obviously, we had a couple of years' relationship prior to him even coming to Iowa State, and I think what you want for everybody in your program is for their dreams to become a reality. And, obviously, with the season he had and how he's continued to develop, he put himself in a great position for the draft."

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



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

at the rim was surprising. However, after I wrote my in-depth piece on him, I understood 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

See **WHO**, 11A

See **KENTUCKY**, 11A