

# UK's late run to NCAA bid began with coach's pep talk

BY KEITH TAYLOR  
KENTUCKY TODAY

LEXINGTON — Change proved to be beneficial for Kentucky down the stretch this month.

After dropping five straight, a stretch in late April that included losses to Vanderbilt, Louisville and South Carolina, Wildcats coach Nick Mingione questioned his team's direction at the time and challenged Kentucky to make things right going into the month of May. "I asked our team that (Sunday) morning, are we headed down the right road right now?" Mingione said. "Unanimous. Everybody says, 'No, we're not going out. ...' "We have to turn and go another direction. If we keep going down this direction, when we get to May, and it's time for the postseason, we will not be playing. There are times when you have to give your players the brutal facts, and you have to accept the state of your reality."

Mingione then told his squad that if they wanted to get to the postseason, they would have to piece together

a productive month. Kentucky won four of its last nine games, including wins over Tennessee, Arkansas and Florida.

Kentucky senior Ethan Hindle said that Sunday conversation in Columbia was eye-opening.

"I'd say just the things that we kind of talked about during that weekend were the turning point," he said. "We really have to sit down and talk about where we were in the season. I think that made everyone realize hey, we've got to go. We've got to figure this out right now and it's time to go."

Kentucky (31-21) was one of the last four teams to receive a bid to the NCAA Tournament and will take on Wake Forest (38-19) at noon today in Morgantown, West Virginia.

Hindle said the key for the third-seeded Wildcats will be to focus on the task at hand

instead of looking to the past.

"I'd say emphasizing the focus of it," Hindle said. "There's got to be a focus on every single inning, every single pitch."

Mingione agreed and added that regardless of the matchups, "they're all hard."

The top seed is West Virginia, which will take on Binghamton in the second game of a doubleheader on Friday. Kentucky and Wake Forest will play in the opener set for noon at Kendrick Family Ballpark.

"I like the fact that we have

really good teams," he said. "I told our team (Monday), I'm like, hey, 'this is an opportunity to like win a really good regional, and I said not to get too far ahead of ourselves.' I was like, but when they announced us, and we celebrated. I didn't even hear who we were playing. And then I learned it was Wake Forest, a great deal of respect, awesome program. I said, but then I realized also, like, who are we paired up with in the super (regional) No. 1 UCLA, and I said I would have no other

way than the hardest. I want to play the best teams, and in our region, and in the tournament alone, those are the best teams in the country.

"I want us to have a path where we have to play the best teams, and regardless of the regional, they're all the best teams left in the country, just told them I embrace this, and I'm looking forward to the challenge."

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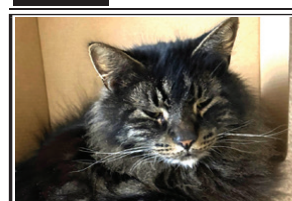
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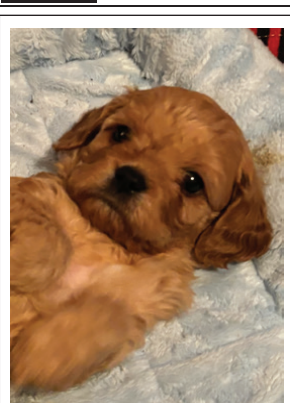
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