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Kentucky Basketball Fans

In Kentucky, the bluegrass state, we have no pro-teams. Although, our men's college basketball teams in the Kentucky Wildcats and Louisville Cardinals have been very successful over the last few years. Some history on the teams; in the 2011-2012 season the Kentucky Wildcats won the NCAA championship in 2012, in the 2012-2013 season the Louisville Cardinals won the championship and last year (2013-2014) the Wildcats went back to the championship game but fell short to Shabazz Napier and the University of Connecticut. As you see both teams represent the state of Kentucky well, but for some reason Louisville is still underrated. In Kentucky, the wildcats get more recognition. The fans are much more aggressive, and the fan base itself is much larger, but I wonder why? Kentucky has fourteen (54) more NCAA appearances than Louisville (40). Kentucky also has sixteen final four appearances and eight national championships versus Louisville's ten final four appearances and 3 national championships. Coach John Calipari, the best thing that's happened to Kentucky, has done such a great job up to this point considering Kentucky has had the number one recruiting class for the past four or five years. That being said, Kentucky produces a lot of "one and done" players, meaning they are so good that one year of college is usually all they need to be a lottery pick in the NBA draft. Is that a good or bad thing? First, you have to take into consideration the players they had over the last couple years. In the 2009-2010 seasons when they had John Wall, Demarcus Cousins and Eric Bledsoe, just to name a few, just think about how good of a

program they could have had if they had all stayed more than one year. The problem is, if they would have stayed more than one year, I highly doubt that Kentucky would have had the number one recruiting class simply because these big time high school basketball players are looking to go to a big time school where they can shine early. Some schools like Louisville, never has these “one and done” type players. Instead Coach Rick Pitino, gets these mediocre players, keeps them all four years which makes their program better because not only are Louisville Athletes staying all four years, but they’re getting their education also. Guard Russ Smith, was good enough to enter the NBA draft after playing three years of college ball but instead he stayed that extra year to help his draft stock, not to mention he got his degree as well. Now what players have better success in the NBA? Kentucky players by far. For example John Wall, Demarcus Cousins, Anthony Davis, Brandon Knight, Eric Bledsoe, Rajon Rando are all elite players in the NBA, but Louisville on the other hand to this point, doesn’t have any noticeable players in the NBA like the University of Kentucky does. That being said, I came up with interview questions to ask three interviewees, to see if they are really Kentucky fans; or if they are just on the bandwagon because of Kentucky’s success in the past.

Through the three interviews, I noticed some similarities. When asking George Brown (my dad), Jonne Chennault (my cousin) and Blake Bowman (my roommate) what was the most embarrassing/humiliating moment as a Kentucky basketball fan, they all mentioned the 2013 Kentucky basketball season (interview 2014). The previous year before that, 2011-2012, they won the NCAA National Championship. In 2013 they didn’t even make it to the NCAA tournament. That was arguably the worst season Kentucky has ever had in their history, as they struggled all season long. Even though they didn’t make to the big tournament their season was

not over just yet. They got invited to play in the NIT (national Invitational Tournament) which is for the teams that are not good enough and didn't qualify for the NCAA tournament. In the first round of the NIT, Kentucky faced opponent Robert Morris, to whom they lost, 59-57. That year was a pathetic year by Kentucky. Coach John Calipari said in an interview "If we'd have won at the buzzer, it would have been a shame" (ESPN 2013), you could tell how humiliated he was. On the other hand Robert Morris head coach, Andy Toole stated "It's probably the greatest consolation prize you can possibly have" (ESPN 2013). Kentucky was projected to win the NIT but Robert Morris beat them in the first round. From a coach's perspective, you have to be happy with that outcome considering Kentucky was ranked in the top 25 earlier that season. Also, the same exact season Kentucky's rival, the Louisville Cardinals won the NCAA championship where they played the University of Michigan. The 2013 season couldn't get any worse, not only for the basketball team but for the fans as well.

When you think back on the previous seasons, what is your favorite moment? They all said when freshman, Aaron Harrison hit the last second three-pointer three times in the 2014 NCAA tournament to advance them to the next round of the playoffs which set them up to play Connecticut in the championship. I think that was one of the best memories in college basketball history because two of the three last second three pointers were back to back against opponents Michigan (elite 8) and Wisconsin (final four) on the same exact spot, the right wing. After hitting the game winning shot against Wisconsin, which made the game 74-73. Aaron Harrison said, Coach [John Calipari said he wanted me to take the shot," he also mentioned "That gave me a lot of confidence. My teammates had confidence in me; I just fed off that" (Clarke 2014). This shows how humble he is and how took full advantage of this

opportunity to put the team on his back and move them closer to their goal which is the National championship. Coach Calipari was impressed as he stated “Guys that make game-winners are not afraid to miss them” (Clarke 2014). He knew how confident of a shooter Harrison was, so he had faith in him that he would make the shot as well. Interviewers asked Sam Dekker what he thought about the shot and he responded “It was a great shot. Aaron has been doing that all tournament. He has got that clutch gene” (Clarke 2014). Aaron Harrison was the go to guy in the NCAA tournament and even though they lost in the championship, he still gave the fans a great memory to look back on and let them know that the next year they’re going to get that championship for them.

After last year’s loss in the championship, Kentucky looks up to pick up where they left off and correct the mistakes they made last year in their tournament run. This upcoming season they are ranked number one in the playoff polls. When asking the interviewees what their expectations were on the upcoming season, they all gave the obvious answer. To go back to the championship but this time, win it (interview 2014). Which is a task that they are very capable of doing considering majority of their team is coming back except Julius Randle who now plays for the Los Angeles Lakers and James who joined Rondo and the Boston Celtics. To replace them, Calipari has added freshman, Karl-Anthony Towns and Trey Lyles which would help tremendously. The 2014-2015 seasons has already started and they are impressing everyone as they started off 3-0 and beat the number five team in the country by 32 points. Kentucky is so good this year, their next five players off the bench could be another top five team’s starting lineup. Coach Calipari realized that, so he came up with a platoon system. The platoon system is basically two different line ups; white and blue squad. The white squad is

Andrew Harrison, Aaron Harrison, Willie-Cauley Stein, Karl-Anthony towns, and Alex Poythress and the blue squad is Marcus Lee, Trey Lyles, Devin Booker, Dakari Johnson, and Tyler Ulis (ESPN 2014). Kentucky as team is the tallest team in College basketball; there average height is 6'6. That being said, Kentucky has very high expectations. The worst to get on twitter is during college basketball season, because pretty much their fans take over. Jay Williams tweeted and said "Kentucky looking like a straight up NBA team with their length, height and quickness. It's not even funny how good they could be" (2014). Just imagine everyone on your timeline tweeting "Kentucky could beat the worst NBA team", "we're going to kill Louisville this year" or "we're going undefeated this year". This is being considered by a lot of sports analysis and other coaches. After beating the number five team in the country, Kansas, they asked their coach if he think it is possibly that Kentucky goes undefeated this season, he replied "don't think it's crazy to think that" (Auerbach 2014). He knows just how good they can be, and that it's very possible for this team to overcome this task even though it's going to be tough.

Aside of the pre-season hype, you when the season is coming when you drive past 430 W Vine St, Lexington Kentucky the week before Big Blue Madness and see thousands of fans camping out just to get tickets. Big blue madness is a frame to the season. At the event, they introduce the Women and Men basketball teams' individually as each player comes out to a favorite song of theirs. After the players are introduced, the men will have a blue/white scrimmage to give the fans a taste of what they are going to look like that season. According to University herald, Kentucky fans are ranked 7th in the top 10 fan bases in college basketball. Kentucky fans are known to be obnoxious. During March Madness, Kentucky fans celebrate their victories on state street. State Street is a huge event and is highly recommended. This is a

gathering of Kentucky fans as they are drunk crowding the whole street, chanting “C-A-T-S, CATS, CATS, CATS” but that’s not it, they knock down all street signs, stand on top of roofs, I even witnessed a female jumping off the top of a roof landed face first of concrete. If you attend, I suggest you wear a helmet because beer bottles are flying everywhere. They don’t only celebrate victories, after a disappointing loss in last year’s championship game they set nine-teen couches on fire. (Wynn 2014). While asking my interviewees, if they have been to State Street during March Madness only two of the have been. My dad said, “I always wanted to go, but I’m too old for that”, followed by that he also said,” they craziest thing I do is just talk smack to my dad and brother because they are UK fans” (George 2014). He’s right though; this event is nothing but college students tearing Lexington apart. Blake and Jonne both said that it was crazy and that they have seen nothing like it. There are usually so many people, that the swat team come out. The police enjoy State Street also, as they just sit back and let the event happen and take pictures with Kentucky fans so they can put them on instagram on twitter. Blake also said in the interview, “it’s a great fan base that I’m proud to be a part of” (interview 2014). So if you want to be a Kentucky fan, go buy you a bunch of Wildcat attire, and be ready to talk smack and tear Lexington down when it comes March.

March Madness is when you celebrate the most. If you are having a celebration, they best way to do it is, start by sending out tournament brackets to your guest as invitations, decorated by using black and orange (Colors for March Madness), cook food such as casseroles, slow-cooked turkey sandwiches, slow-cooked Mexican dip, etc., when you cook things try to shape them in ball form and have guest to wear the team your representing while you’re wearing a referee uniform so people can easily notice whose house you are at (Taste of home).

Maybe that's over doing because my dad and I celebrate by watching the game in living room, wear Kentucky Wildcat attire, and my mom will cook finger foods such as; barbeque meatballs, sausage sip, mini-hotdogs and other finger foods while me and my dad are watching the game drinking beer except not really, because I'm not old enough yet. Blake celebrates depending on how big the game is. He said for instance if the game is during March Madness then id mother cooks finger foods for ever Kentucky game (Interview 2014). Jonne celebrates by watching the game with her family in the living room, her mother will also cook little small foods, and for her family on game days it gets very intense.

In order to be a true fan you must purchase a blank authentic jersey with no name on the back, don't talk trash talk your friends unless they ask for it, don't use "we" referring to your team, and you live in a city with a professional team or college team you must root for them (Simmons 2012). But how exactly do you become a fan. Growing up, I remember my dad always buying my Kentucky attire and saying that I'm going to be a UK fan. Every game day, we would sit me in his lap while I'm a Kentucky basketball watching the game. So I was born and raised to be a Kentucky fan. Also Lexington is just thirty minutes away from my home so it's easy to travel there to catch a game. My dad is a Kentucky fan simply because he loves the fan base, and the talent that came there throughout the years. Blake used to watch the games with his mom and she has always been a UK fan so it just passed down to him, and Jonne became a fan because when she was younger, her granddad used to make her watch the UK games with him and even though he is deceased, to this day she still watches them play, so he is the reason why she is a fan. So as you can see, you can be born to be a Kentucky fan or it can be learned as we call them "jumping on the bandwagon. The bandwagon fans is anyone who claims they are

a “fan” of a particular sports team, even though they had no prior support in the team until they started winning” (Urban Dictionary). For example I am a LeBron James fan, so when he left the Miami Heat to go back to the Cleveland Cavaliers, I became a fan also because I thought they was going automatically a winning team in the NBA so I jumped on the Cavaliers bandwagon.

To conclude, this interview I found similarities and differences between each of my interviewees. I have to say they seem like loyal fans, and they’re not jumping on the bandwagon because Kentucky happens to be a very successful program. The thing about fans on the bandwagon, you will never know if they were really “true fans”. When people ask me if I always been a Cavalier fan I say yes, because in my folk group, they’ll make a big deal out of it. Blake and Jonne were born into Kentucky fans because of their families but my dad learned to be a Kentucky fan by just watching them consistently and knowing their program. Not only did I find similarities in my interviews but I shared similarities with them as well. For instance we all have the same embarrassing/humiliating moment, have the same favorite memory from Aaron Harrison hitting the game winning shot in the NCAA tournament, and I also related to Blake and Jonne, as we both been to Stare Street. I learned a lot about them, and also about Kentucky’s basketball program itself. Now I feel like I’m a better fan, and more prepared for the season coming at hand like my interviewees and the rest of the Wildcat nation.

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