



It Says Here

Publisher Oscar Combs

Oscar Combs'
BIG BLUE BASKETBALL

As the new year begins, Kentucky was on the verge of closing out a very impressive beginning with a 7-0 mark entering the final game of the old year Dec. 31 against Vanderbilt.

As the new year begins, Kentucky hopes to pick up where it left off the old year, a victory over Vanderbilt and a perfect 8-0 slate as the 'Cats headed on the road to Atlanta for their first SEC trip of the season.

With Kentucky's seven-game streak in 1987, a large chunk of credit must go to fifth-year senior Winston Bennett, the hard-working youngster from Louisville who refuses to accept defeat.

Sir Winston, it seems, has always been in someone's shadow, whether it be the Twin Towers of Sam Bowie and Melvin Turpin, or Kenny Walker or Rex Chapman.

And there was a time when he probably was just happy to be in someone's shadow.

That was last season when he recuperated from serious knee surgery and pondered his future, or if he would even have one on the hardwoods.

There was plenty of doubt in a lot of minds around Kentucky and the nation, but not in Winston's. It was only a matter of "when" he would return and not "if" he would return.

You often hear in this world of athletics that if anyone can come back from a serious knee injury, "this" particular kid can do it or "that" particular kid can do it. Few seldom do.

Winston is one who has.

All those lonely nights of pain in the hospital room and the days which followed at Wildcat Lodge still are very clear in Winston's mind.

But it only means the achievement of returning to his old form is that much more significant. Winston's play during December leaves no doubt that he has returned successfully.

Don't get the wrong impression. He isn't back to the level he was at when he went down with the injury some 15 months ago. But he's getting close.

And because of his great inside play, Kentucky is forcing opponents to play other Wildcats more honestly.

The player who benefits most is probably center Rob Lock. With Bennett to be con-

cerned with, opposing teams have to play Lock one-on-one and Rob is showing he's a pretty tough cookie to crumble, one-on-one. Ditto for senior Cedric Jenkins.

When Bennett, Jenkins and Lock are playing well, then you can imagine how Ed Davender and Chapman feel around the three-point line where they're used to be ganged up on like a couple skinny kids circled by a gang of bullies.

There is a growing list of experts proclaiming Davender and Chapman as the nation's finest guard combination. ESPN's Dick Vitale started the campaign and there have been few dissenters. I certainly don't know of a better pair, but Vitale and others should remember that UK's newfound inside game should receive a nice assist.

When the history books record the 1987-88 season, I'll be very surprised if Winston Bennett doesn't go down as the one missing ingredient from 1986-87 which solved the chemistry problem for 1988.

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The boys over at the athletics department finally gave due justice to one of Kentucky's favorite sons, Dan Issel.

The Wildcats' all-time leading scorer (2,138) and rebounder (1,078) had his jersey retired moments before the tipoff of the Louisville-Kentucky matchup last month. UK athletics director Cliff Hagan pointed out that it was the first time since 1954 that UK had given such an honor to a former basketball player.

"It's very, very nice," Issel noted, "and a complete surprise. My wife (Cheri) isn't here and I wish she could have seen it."

The All-American from Batavia, Ill., played under the legendary Adolph Rupp from 1968-70. From there he went on to the American Basketball Association Kentucky Colonels and later the NBA, playing for the Denver Nuggets. In his days with the Colonels, Issel was the crowd favorite at Freedom Hall. During his stay with the Louisville organization, he became a part of the team's lone championship season.

After retiring from the Nuggets in 1985, Issel's point production was amazing, scoring more than 30,000 points which currently places him fourth among the all-time

scorers in the professional ranks.

"I had a great 15 years in the pros," Issel said, "but my favorite years were at Kentucky. Because of the enthusiasm and the support of the fans."

Today, Issel owns a thoroughbred horse farm in Versailles. He also is active in various charity and civic activities.

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Several recruiting experts in Lexington for the Coca-Cola Thoroughbred Classic believe Kentucky will still wind up with California Don MacLean when the April signing period arrives.

Bob Gibbons of *All-Star Sports Publications* says he believes it will come down to Georgia Tech or Kentucky and that if he was going to pick Tech, he would have done it in November.

Both Bill Cronaeur and Van Coleman also believe Kentucky's chances are as good or better than anyone else's, although some think UCLA might have an outside shot.

Speaking of MacLean, Don had a brilliant tournament at the Beach Ball Classic in South Carolina late in December and scored 35 points and 18 rebounds in a 95-91 loss to Clay County of Kentucky in the title game of the losers' bracket.

MacLean had a total of 48 rebounds in the tournament which is only one shy of the tournament record.

Richie Farmer led the winners with 33 points and set a single-game assists record with 16 in the game against MacLean's Simi Valley High team. Clay County improved its record to 10-1 with the win while Simi Valley fell to 9-3.

Farmer and teammate Russ Chadwell, along with MacLean, were named to the all-tourney team. Farmer was selected the tourney's Outstanding Player while Kenny Anderson of Archbishop Malloy was named the Most Valuable Player.

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HOOP TIDBITS . . . Auburn, expected to make a strong run for one of the top three

[Continued On Page 19]