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Believe it or not, but UK's in running for a bowl

With just three games left in the regular season, coach Jerry Claiborne and his Wildcats find themselves in a position they all hoped for back in the summer.

With an even 4-4 record and an even shot to beat any and/or all three remaining opponents, UK could not have hoped for a better situation in its wildest dreams.

Oh sure, it would have been sweeter had Kentucky upset either Alabama or LSU or Auburn, but most fans would have been elated had you told them UK would be 4-4 after eight games.

What makes the situation so inviting now is that the three remaining opponents have all proved themselves to be beatable. In fact, the trio (Vanderbilt, Florida and Tennessee) has a combined won-loss mark of 9-13 and only the Gators have won more (5) than they've lost (3) this season.

So believe it or not folks, Kentucky actually has a shot at a postseason bowl. In fact, *USA Today* listed UK as one of the schools the Liberty Bowl has an eye on for its Dec. 28 classic in Memphis, Tenn.

But don't order those tickets just yet. Kentucky probably has to sweep its three opponents to earn a bowl invitation and, while that isn't impossible, it could fall into the category of highly unlikely.

The Wildcats have the firepower to beat all three if they play up to their potential. They have also shown they have the ability to dog it every once in a while like they did against Southern Illinois Saturday. A repeat of that effort will cost the 'Cats a victory on any of the next three Saturdays.

First comes Vanderbilt, a team which quite honestly has not lived up to preseason expectations. After surprising several opponents last fall (Kentucky included), the Commodores were expected to make strong waves in the SEC. With Eric Jones firing the bombs like a true Commodore, Vandy appeared to be on target for a big splash.

They've certainly been a mystery.

Vandy got off to a 2-0 start with victories over Mississippi State (24-20) and Rutgers (31-30), but got shelled 44-10 by Alabama and then got upset by Duke 17-15 before losing a third consecutive game at Georgia by a score of 41-22.

Just as quickly, the Commodores struck back and shocked Florida 24-9 but were upset by Ole Miss 36-28. Vandy enjoyed an open date last week.

So with two weeks to prepare for the 'Cats, just what can Kentucky expect?

For starters, a barrage of bombs. You may see a record number of passes in this contest, for each team.

On the other side of the ball, Vandy hasn't been challenging the league leaders for defensive honors. In fact, Vandy has given up at least 17 or more points in six of its seven games this season.

And lest we forget, Vanderbilt is sitting in just about the same position, bowl-wise, as Kentucky is.

The Commodores have four games remaining and could easily win all four, thus giving Vandy a 7-4 record. After

UK, Vandy travels to Army and Memphis State before hosting Tennessee Nov. 26.

So this is a very important game for both clubs. One likely will leave Commonwealth Stadium in a happy mood, knowing it has a good shot at postseason bowl action. The loser? Well, it will still have a regular season finale against Tennessee to look forward to.

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Looks like the SEC championship is still up in the air, but the LSU at Alabama game Saturday could go a long way toward dissolving the logjam at the top of the league standings which has four teams (Alabama, LSU, Georgia and Auburn) with just a single conference loss.

Florida dropped its second league game Saturday as Auburn left Gainesville with a 16-0 shutout. The Gators try to stay in the race this Saturday if they can beat the Bulldogs at Jacksonville, but don't count on it.

Should Florida lose, the Gators will ride into frigid Commonwealth Stadium next week on the heels of a four-game losing streak.

Galen Hall's troops got off to a fast 5-0 start, but haven't won since the Gators beat LSU 19-6 on Oct. 1. One of the big reasons for the Gators' about-face has been the loss of Emmitt Smith, who was injured almost a month ago but could be back in time for the Kentucky game.

If LSU should beat Alabama Saturday, it will be awfully tough for the Tigers not to earn at least a piece of the title. LSU has only Mississippi State left on its league schedule.

But you can rest assured that the Auburn-Alabama game on Nov. 25 will have something to say about which team earns the SEC title in 1988.

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Thank goodness basketball has finally arrived. The good portion that is.

After all the controversy since last April, it's great that we can finally begin talking about what's happening on the court and not in a courtroom.

Coach Eddie Sutton unveiled his Wildcats for the first time Tuesday night at Louisville's Freedom Hall. Some of you may be reading this as you sit in Freedom Hall for the first public scrimmage of the year.

Regardless of the outcome of the NCAA investigation, Kentucky fans should be ready to stand behind the Kentucky program once all the questions have been answered.

After all is said and done, Kentucky will either be judged innocent or guilty. Either way, fans should not give up on the Kentucky program.

If UK is guilty, it should pay the proper penalty and then fans everywhere should support Kentucky even more. A good way to demonstrate loyalty would be

one which fans should have been using long ago. Wear true blue to any and all UK events.

I've traveled to a lot of places over the past 13 years and it's always amazed me how loyal opposing teams' fans were in showing "their colors."

Have you ever seen a Tennessee fan without something orange on? Have you ever spotted an Indiana booster not wearing red? What's so bad about wearing blue?

Oh, I know, some brilliant media type might say you're a fanatic if you should wear a blue hat or blue pants. So what! A great place for Kentuckians to begin their new show of faith for the Big Blue would be the Big Four Classic in Indianapolis, right in front of all those Hoosiers, Irish and Cardinal fans.

Show 'em the 'Cats will be back and that you're proud of them. This team may not have the most talent in the world, but they'll fight you every inch of the way and you cannot ask for anything more.

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Coach Sutton opened his team's practice to the media for the first time Monday.

Sutton says he's been pleased with the effort his team has been putting forth, but admits the overall level of talent is considerably down with the unexpected loss of Eric Manuel, along with Rex Chapman going to the pros and the Prop 48 losses of Shawn Kemp and Sean Woods.

The most pleasant surprise to Sutton in the early practice rounds has been the play of freshman Chris Mills. The UK boss says Mills' level of competition in Los Angeles has been a telling force in his early play.

If you can make anything from Sutton's facial expression, just go ahead and pencil in Mills' name as a starter by the time the Duke game rolls around later this month in Springfield, Mass.

It would be stupid for anyone in the media to speculate on a starting lineup since no one from the media has viewed a single practice, but if you can pay any stock to "reliable" inside reports, it's safe to say Mills, LeRon Ellis, Sean Sutton and Derrick Miller are early leaders.

Although all reporters have been banned from practice sessions, Dave Baker of WKYT-TV, Channel 27, got quite a laugh from everyone last week when he posed as a custodian (compete with a janitor's uniform and broom) and sneaked inside the coliseum before finally being spotted.

Actually, it would have been nice if we all could have witnessed the stunt. It probably is just what has been needed to break all the tension around the basketball arena the past few weeks.

Thankfully, those in charge took it for what it was: A prank. Had they been more serious, we probably wouldn't be seeing good ol' Dave at Rupp Arena this season. You see, we were told in no uncertain terms a couple weeks ago that if any media person violated any media

rule, press credentials would be taken for the season.

Hey, let's get on with the games.

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FIRST AND TENS . . . After his sterling exhibition against Georgia, Alfred Rawls was named the SEC Offensive Back of the Week by the league office and he continued his great play against Southern Illinois. You can bet those Georgia fans are still asking questions why Vince Dooley let this one get away during his junior college days . . . The crowd was listed as being better than 50,000 for the Kentucky-Southern Illinois game, but if it was, they must have spotted about 10,000 or so either at the concession stands or in their cars, because they definitely weren't in the stands. Until this game, the estimates at Commonwealth Stadium were very, very accurate by most observers. Perhaps UK wanted to impress bowl executives who look for attendance figures at home games of prospective teams just as quickly as they look to the final score. After all, bowls want teams which have a strong following . . . No one is saying so, but I can't help but believe that UK president David Roselle will award Jerry Claiborne with a new contract at the season's end, regardless of the outcome of the last three games . . . Have you seen all those trading cards of former UK basketball players on candy counters around the state? Some 10 million were distributed by a Louisville company in conjunction with the UK Athletics Association. The UKAA received a nice fat check (\$61,000 all told) as its share of the profit. Because of NCAA regulations, current players cannot be included on the cards, but that hasn't slowed the popularity of the set. A pack of eight cards sells for 45 cents. If you've got a little extra pocket change and want to be among the very elite, you can purchase one of the gold card sets at a cool \$2,500 (that's right twenty-five hundred dollars). Only 500 sets were made of the gold card edition . . . Is Kentucky headed for cable television in Kentucky? The UKAA is now in the process of taking bids for both radio and television rights to UK basketball and football games for next school year. Rumors have it that cable television could be involved as well as another new wrinkle or two. Jim Host, CEO of Host Communications of Lexington, has outlined a major proposal to a special radio-television committee at UK which could put the athletics association onto a new level of corporate sponsorships as well as completely overhauling the department's handling of everything from radio-television to marketing and promotions to all of its publishing and printing projects. Host is making a pitch to take over most of the department's projects and according to one university official, the move could bring the athletics department a substantial amount of new additional money to the department.