



Oscar L. Combs

Cats' Pause Publisher



Yes Folks, The Big Blue Is Alive And Well

The 'Cats on fire!
You'd better believe it. Since the infamous 76-41 bombing at the hands of Louisiana State, Eddie Sutton's club has been a different team, save the 11-point loss to Ole Miss.

In fact, the Wildcats have won five of six since that dark Sunday afternoon. And the 76-65 loss to Ole Miss wasn't all that big a major upset considering that Ole Miss has been giving most everyone on the SEC fits this season.

Still, make no mistake that the loss in Oxford was, and still is a bitter pill for Sutton to swallow.

But the past is history just like the so-called January slump which regained its reputation in 1987, thanks to a so-so 6-4 mark after a fine 6-2 December.

Now, Kentucky is beginning to put all the pieces together.

In other words, the Big Blue is finding ways, as in teamwork, to win.

Against Auburn, senior James Blackmon played the finest game of his career.

That victory wasn't a shocker, but when the 'Cats left Tuscaloosa Saturday by upending SEC leader Alabama, Kentucky had issued notice to the remainder of the league that the Big Blue is alive and well.

And yes, the 'Cats will show up in Atlanta next month.

In most everyone's book, the top three teams in the SEC are Alabama, Florida and Auburn. Kentucky has proven its worth against two of the three and will have a chance to make even bigger waves this Saturday when UK takes on SEC co-leader Florida in Gainesville.

First, Kentucky will entertain Tennessee Wednesday night and this one should be a dandy.

Hoping to get revenge for an embarrassing 75-68 loss in Knoxville last month, Kentucky can keep its drive alive to finish in the league's top four and a respectable seed in the NCAA tournament next month.

While Tennessee is still recuperating from the persistent rumors that Vols' coach Don DeVoe won't be around when the new 25,000-seat arena opens next season, the Vols have done anything but die.

After UT athletics director Doug Dickey announced at a press conference last week that DeVoe's status won't be reviewed before the end of next season, the Vols promptly hit the floor and turned back Vanderbilt in overtime and gave the LSU Tigers the scare of their lives before losing in the final minute in Baton Rouge.

Although the Vols are in ninth place with a 4-8 record, the Big Orange is capable of winning any time out. Only problem is that the Vols have not been very impressive on the road in the last couple years.

Last season, Tennessee lost all nine road games in the conference, and hasn't fared much better this season, although the Vols did break the string earlier this season by upsetting Vandy in Nashville. The Vols' four league wins are home court wins over Kentucky, Mississippi State and Vanderbilt and the road win at Nashville.

To keep in perspective the importance of the upset over Kentucky in Knoxville, it's necessary to point out that Mississippi State

has won only one league game all season. And you can imagine how the folks in Nashville are feeling since Vandy would be in third place with a 7-4 record had C. M. Newton's club won those two against Tennessee.

Tennessee has been playing a lot of people close, but DeVoe hasn't found the right combination with All-America Tony White. Things don't get any easier for the Vols.

After a visit to Lexington, Tennessee returns home but has to face two of the league's toughest, Auburn and Florida before hitting the road again to Starkville and Tuscaloosa.

Tennessee won't finish last in the SEC because Mississippi State is 1-11 and probably won't win another game unless it is the one against the Vols. Depending on how the Vols fight back, Tennessee could finish as high as fifth or as low as No. 9.

As we said in this space a week ago, each and every game appears to be the biggest one of the season. That's the why it is when you find yourself in a win-or-else situation with your back to the wall.

While any hopes of winning a league title would have to come under the "miracle" category, this Kentucky team has proven something I didn't think possible—that is to beat a legitimate Top Ten team on the road.

After the horrendous 35-point loss at home to LSU, the Wildcats' worksheet showed a 9-5 mark and the appearance of a disappointing future with three of their next five SEC games on the road.

But a funny thing happened. Once again, Kentucky apparently likes playing on the road better than Rupp Arena.

First the 'Cats upended a good Vanderbilt team 71-65, but lost to Ole Miss. Those of

little faith (tsk, tsk) were throwing in the towel after a very lackluster 50-36 ho-hummer over Mississippi State at home.

With Auburn coming to town in hopes of making atonement for an earlier loss in Tigtown, Kentucky fans were ready to take another lumping like the likes of earlier duels with Alabama and LSU.

Kentucky simply turned the other cheek, put on a dazzling exhibition of play and then held on for dear life. The die-hards cheered up but it wasn't until the 'Cats delivered a knock-out punch to Alabama in Tuscaloosa that the fair-weather fans came home to roost.

Now UK has some of its fans thinking it can be a factor in upcoming post season play. Heaven forbid, but there are some who believe the 'Cats can actually win a couple games in the big one.

With that in mind, let's take a peak at what lies ahead.

In addition to home court games with Tennessee, Vanderbilt and Ole Miss, the 'Cats will also host Oklahoma on March 1.

After Wednesday's battle with the Vols, Kentucky will hit the road for one of the league's top games at Gainesville. After this week, the 'Cats have only two road games left—at LSU and Georgia.

Both were considered "sure" losses before last Saturday, but UK is finding the road more playable each time out.

Through Kentucky's first six league road contests, the Wildcats own a fine 4-2 mark. Ironically, the only road losses came at the hands of No. 8 Ole Miss and No. 9 Tennessee.

If the Wildcats play the remainder of their schedule (and that's a big if with this team), UK could go 3-0 at home. And then if UK should win one of the three road contests, the Wildats would compile a 11-7 league mark and that should be good enough for a third-place tie. Two wins on the road could give UK a

12-6 mark which probably would not move UK up to No. 2, but would give the 'Cats a solid No. 3 finish.

Now if one of those upsets should come at Gainesville, then the knees at the top (specifically Alabama and Florida) could begin knocking just a tad.

It still figures to be a two-horse race for the top spot between Alabama and Florida and can you imagine the last time the Florida Gators were cheering for a Kentucky basketball team prior to last Saturday?

Well, you can rest assured Wimp Sander-son will return the favor this Saturday when the 'Cats try to upset Florida. Media types in Florida are playing this up as the biggest game in recent memory for any Gator fan.

For the Gators to have a shot at the league crown, a victory this Saturday is a must for Florida since the Gators cannot afford to drop a game off the pace.

Both Alabama and Florida have three road games left, but the schedule favors, ever-so-slightly, the Crimson Tide because the final game of the season has Florida going against the Tide in Tuscaloosa.

Florida's two other road trips are at Tennessee and Vanderbilt while Alabama's road contests are at Vanderbilt, LSU and Auburn.

Bama's biggest challenge is staying even till the season finale because three of Bama's next four games are on the road before concluding the season with three of four at home.

Florida, meanwhile, plays three games at home this week winding up with UK on Saturday. Then the big crunch arrives as the Gators must wind up the SEC slate with three straight road contests—at Tennessee, Vanderbilt and Alabama.

Norm Sloan certainly doesn't want to be in the position of trying to catch up on the road and that would be the situation the Gators would face if they stub their toes this week.

By the time most of you read this issue of TCP, most of the nation's prep football stars will have been inked to national letters-of-intent and hopefully coach Jerry Claiborne and his staff will harvest their finest crop ever.

At presstime, three of the biggest catches were still undecided, at least publicly, as to where they would be attending college this fall.

The recruiting battles for the services of Newport Central Catholic's Frank Jacobs, Louisville Male's Jeff Ellis and Holy Cross' Phil Logan apparently were going to the wire.

For Kentucky to have a great recruiting campaign the 'Cats needed to sign all three. And with none of the three having announced with less than 72 hours prior to signing, the prospects of such a sweep seemed like a longshot.

Jacobs made his official visit to Penn State over the weekend during the Nittany Lions' so-called "super" sweep. Coach Joe Paterno had all the highly-ranked non-Pennsylvania prepsters in for their official visits.

Just so happens that the 1987 Penn State

[Continued On Page 5]

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY IN-STATE FOOTBALL COMMITMENTS

Jerry Bell	DL	6-3	260	Louisville DeSales
Steve Kelley	LB	6-2	225	Hopkinsville
Larry Jackson	DB	5-11	170	Mayfield
Courtney Longacre	C	6-2	223	Louisville Fairdale
Jim Graves	OL	6-6	240	Lexington Henry Clay
Shawn Evans	TE	6-6	220	Madison Central
David Scott	RB	6-1	195	Jeffersontown
Jeff Houk	QB	6-2	200	Louisville St. Xavier
Freddie Maggard	QB	6-2	180	Cumberland
Todd George	OL	6-5	235	Covington Catholic
Billy Swanson	LB	6-0	220	Paducah Tilghman
William Dishman	RB	6-0	198	Lexington Bryan Station
Derrick Thomas	LB	6-2	215	Lexington Bryan Station
Joey Couch	LB	6-2	225	Paintsville

ON THE FENCE

Jeff Ellis	TE	6-4	230	Louisville Male
Frank Jacobs	TE	6-4	230	Newport Catholic
Phil Logan	RB	6-3	180	Louisville Holy Cross