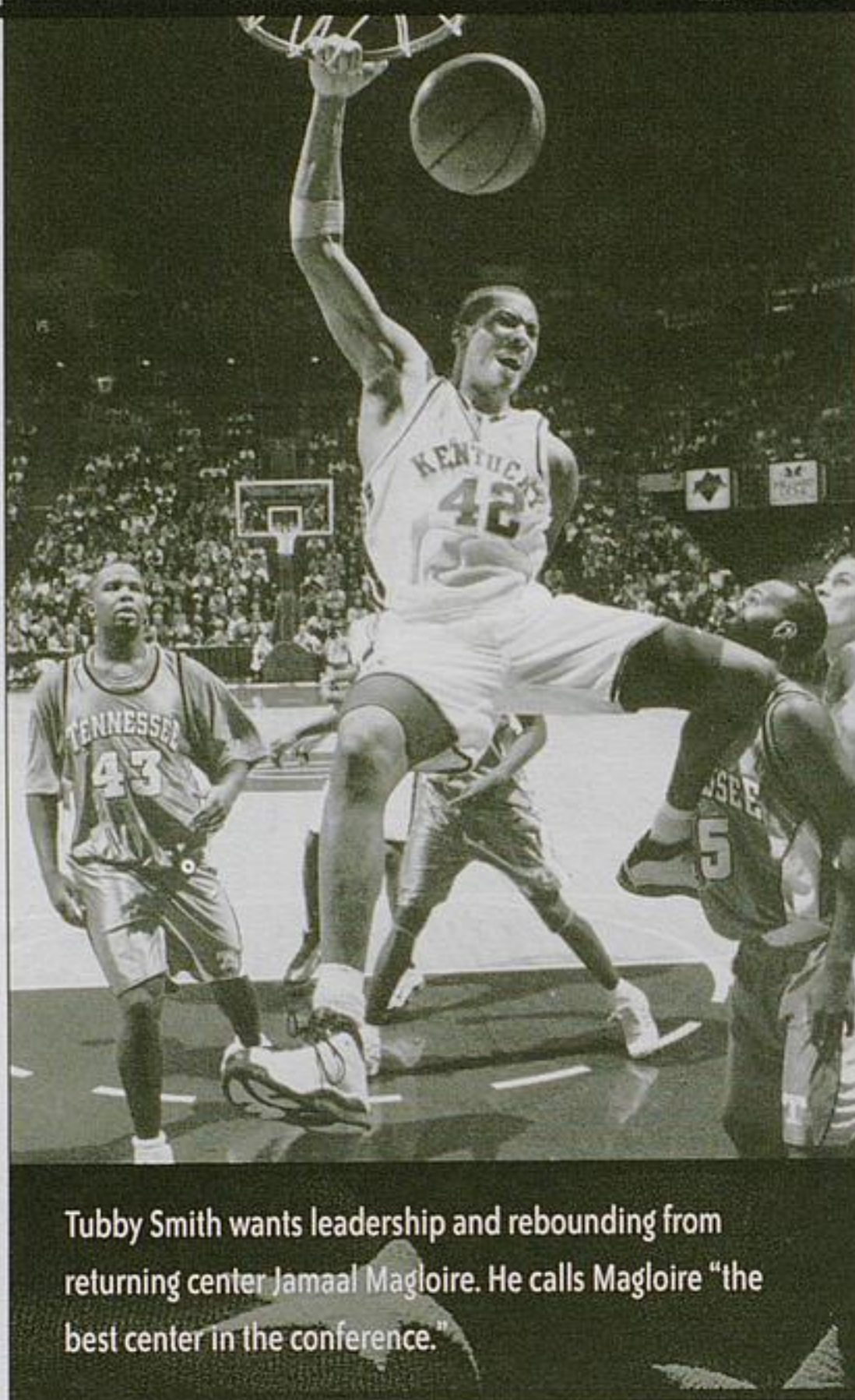
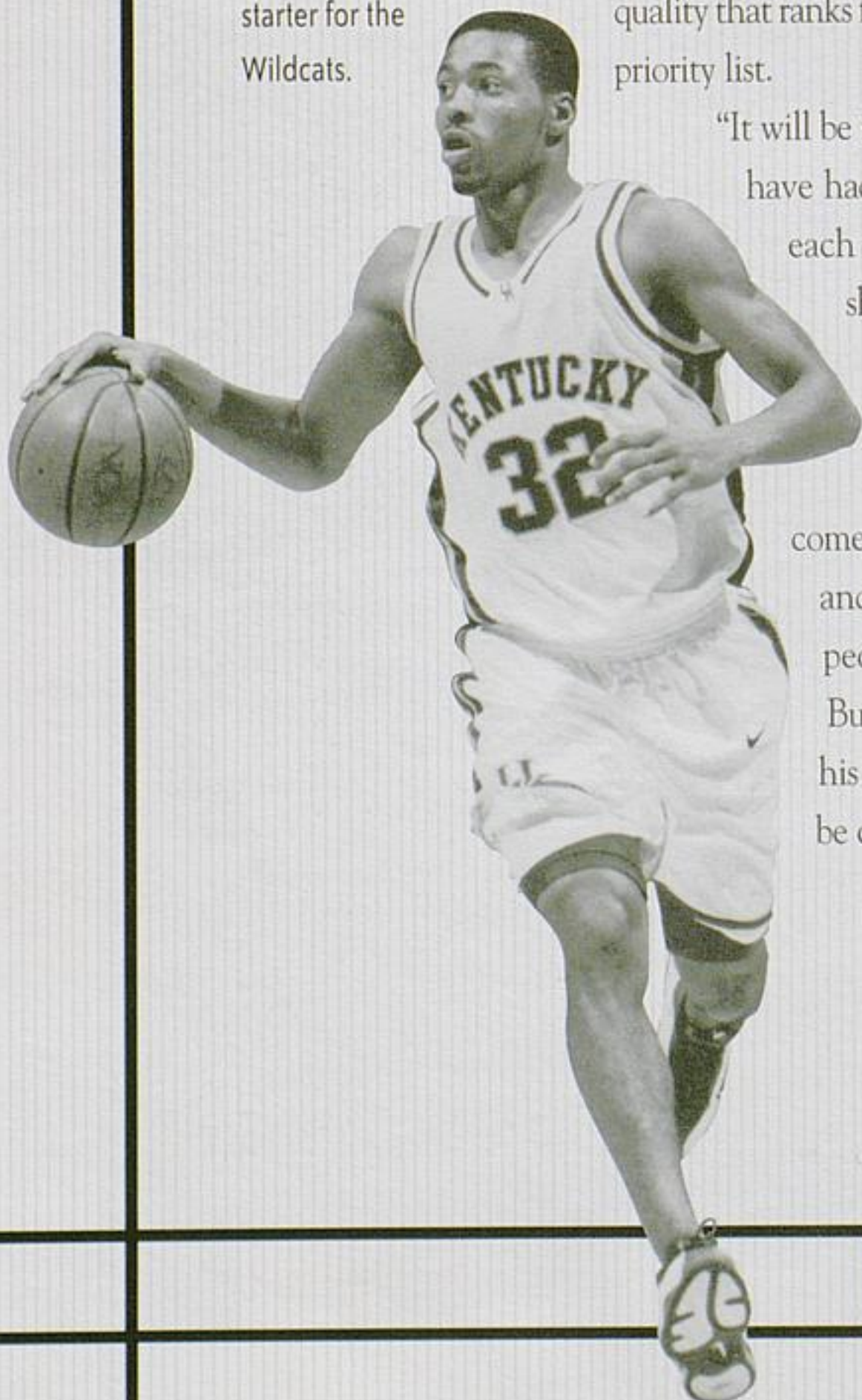


"I think he learned a lot from his experience in the pre-NBA Draft workouts," a relieved Coach Smith replied. "Afterwards, he told me, 'I am going to improve, I am going to make myself a better player. I will be a lottery pick or one of the top choices in the draft.' And he can make that happen."

Magloire can provide post offense, shot blocking and rebounding, but Smith will also summon the senior's leadership skills, an immeasurable quality that ranks first on Smith's priority list.

"It will be important. We have had three seniors each year that shared the leadership role," Smith said. "It has to come from within and we'll have people emerge. But for Jamaal, his leadership will be critical."

Desmond Allison is the only returning starter for the Wildcats.



Tubby Smith wants leadership and rebounding from returning center Jamaal Magloire. He calls Magloire "the best center in the conference."

Once the leadership is in place, Kentucky stands to be an explosive, exciting top-10 team. Smith will have diversity among his team — players who can play multiple positions with multiple talents. And with the strength and experience Magloire brings, it's obvious that he's most pleased with his bigger Wildcats.

"I think people will notice our quickness and athleticism in our front court, and because of that quickness, we'll be able to press more," Smith said. "We will be a better defensive team. I know that's hard to believe because we've had the best field goal defense at UK in the last 30 years."

Last season, UK held opponents to 38.1 percent shooting. The year before, Smith's same ball-line defense limited the opposition to 38.4 percent. Both marks are the best at UK since 1962.

So while the defense is stable, the offense appears to need shooters. Padgett was UK's most consistent long-range threat last season. Evans and Ryan Hogan also were effective at times. All are gone.

"I think we will be a better shooting team, not to take anything away from Scott, Wayne or Heshimu," Smith said. "But Desmond hit 39 percent last season from three-point range, Tayshaun and Keith (Bogans) can knock it down, and Saul (Smith) hit 50 percent from outside during the NCAA Tournament. With the confidence they have, we'll make this a good outside shooting team."

Defense, shooting, leadership... questions that seem to have answers. If answered, can these young Cats claw themselves into position to make a title chase?

"We will have to mature to be great," Smith said. "That will come after getting in the fire, getting in the battles, fighting those little skirmishes. Then we can win the game."