

THEIR VIEW

Is Kentucky the greatest college team ever? Might be

With every dominating win — we’re up to 37-0 — it becomes more and more apparent that Kentucky really isn’t competing against the remaining teams in the NCAA Tournament. History is the opponent now. Are these Wildcats better than the 1956 San Francisco Dons featuring Bill Russell and K.C. Jones? How about all those great UCLA teams of the 1960s and ‘70s with the likes of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Bill Walton? And is this edition of Big Blue even better than the last champion to go through a season unblemished, the 1976 Indiana Hoosiers?

Nothing against those giants of the game, but we’ll take Kentucky — with a caveat.

These Wildcats still must win three more games, starting with Saturday’s Midwest Regional final against Notre Dame.

But if they complete their run to 40-0 perfection — and it would take a Villanova-beating-George-town-sized upset to stop it — they deserve to be at the top of the list.

Quinn Buckner, one of the stars of that undefeated Indiana team, was asked what it would take to beat Kentucky

“You’ve got to shoot it exceptionally well, you can’t turn it over, and you’ve got to rebound against them,” he said. “And then you still have to play defense, too.”

Oh, and one other thing. “They’re going to have to have a bad day,” West Virginia coach Bob Huggins moaned after the Wildcats blew out his team by 39 points in the round of 16.

Given their size, depth, commitment to defense, and willingness to share the spotlight, a bad day deems beyond comprehension.

Just ask the Mountaineers, who never stood a chance.

“I thought going in that the 2010 team may be more talented,” Huggins said, referring to the Kentucky squad that featured NBA standouts John Wall, DeMarcus Cousins and Eric Bledsoe. “But I don’t think that team guarded the way this team guards. That’s the difference. This team is absolutely fantastic defensively.”

With a bigger front line than most NBA teams and essentially two starting units to keep the pressure on opponents for the full 40 minutes, Kentucky will stand as the greatest NCAA champion ever if it can win out — with all due respect to those epic teams through the years.

The Wildcats have really been on a roll since what constitutes their only “slump” of the season — consecutive overtime victories over Ole Miss and Texas A&M back in early January, at the start of Southeastern Conference play.

After that blip, the next 22 wins came by an average of 19.1 points, with all but four games decided by double-digit margins. Kentucky has turned it up another notch in the post-season, romping through three SEC tournament games and three NCAA games by an average margin of 21.5 points, including Thursday’s 78-39 destruction of West Virginia. During that span, the Wildcats have limited opponents to 34 percent shooting from the field and 23 percent from 3-point range.

“They’re just so big and so long,” Huggins said, sounding like he was talking about a team from another planet.

He might as well be, given the other-worldly starting front line of 7-footer Willie Cauley-Stein, 6-11 Karl-Anthony Towns and 6-10 Trey Lyles. True, the Wildcats don’t have a player who stands out like Russell, Abdul-Jabbar, Walton or Indiana’s Scott May, but that’s only because this might be the deepest squad ever. Nine strong, all capable of starting for just about any team in the

country. By some projections, there are as many as six first-round NBA picks on the roster.

Also, Kentucky is playing in a deeper era, with more good teams, than the NCAA’s seven perfect champions, even taking into account that the top players only hang around for a year or two before heading to the NBA. Making the Wildcats’ path even tougher, they must win six tournament games over three weeks to cut down the nets, a big reason there hasn’t been an undefeated team since the field expanded to 64 teams in 1985.

Compare that with San Francisco, North Carolina in 1957, and UCLA’s four unbeaten teams under coach John Wooden, all of which needed only four NCAA wins to complete their championship seasons. Or Indiana, which had to win five NCAA games to finish 32-0.

Kentucky’s juggernaut came together in large part because coach John Calipari, by his usual one-and-done standards, has a very experienced team. He added another stellar recruiting class — Towns, Lyle and guards Devin Booker and Tyler Ulis — to a larger-than-expected group of returnees, including Cauley-Stein (a junior) and four sophomores: twins Aaron and Andrew Harrison, who start in the backcourt; 7-footer Dakari Johnson; and 6-9 Marcus Lee.

The Wildcats didn’t miss a beat when one of their stalwarts, Alex Poythress, tore up a knee in December and was lost for the season.

No reason to think they’ll slip up now.

Not with No. 1 — in any era — there for the taking.



PAUL NEWBERRY
AP Sports

Hernandez fiancée takes stand

Shayanna Jenkins discusses money and weapon at murder trial

By MICHELLE R. SMITH
Associated Press

FALL RIVER, Mass. — Former New England Patriots player Aaron Hernandez and his fiancée traded expressionless glances Friday as she took the witness stand to testify in his murder trial.

Shayanna Jenkins was called by prosecutors after being granted immunity, which means she was ordered to testify by the court or face time behind bars.

Jenkins, Hernandez’s high school sweetheart and the mother of his 2-year-old daughter, appeared to be a reluctant and careful witness, pausing for long periods before answering and saying she couldn’t remember details of the time surrounding the June 17, 2013, killing of Odin Lloyd, who was dating her younger sister. Lloyd’s bullet-riddled body was found in an industrial park near the home Hernandez and Jenkins shared.

But some of what Jenkins said could hurt Hernandez, including that minutes after she dropped him off at a police station to be questioned about Lloyd’s death he directed her to give money to one of his co-defendants.

“He told me to meet up with Bo and give him money,” Jenkins said, referring to Ernest Wallace.

Wallace and a third man, Carlos Ortiz, have pleaded not guilty in the killing and will be tried later.

Hernandez, 25, watched Jenkins intently during her testimony, which lasted much of the day. She will return Monday to continue testifying. She previously pleaded not guilty to perjury in connection with the case. Prosecutors say she lied to a grand jury investigating the killing.

Jenkins, also 25, mostly avoided looking at Hernandez while she testified. During a sidebar, she looked at jurors and around the courtroom but not in his direction. It was a change



AP Photo/CJ Gunther, Pool

Shayanna Jenkins, fiancée of former New England Patriots football player Aaron Hernandez, testifies during his murder trial, Friday in Fall River, Mass. Hernandez is charged with killing Odin Lloyd.

from earlier in the trial, when she would sit behind Hernandez, whispering “I love you” and joking with him.

But she had not appeared in court for the past three weeks. On Friday, she was wearing the large diamond engagement ring she typically wears on her left ring finger.

She first appeared in court Friday morning outside the presence of jurors and was asked about what she would say on the witness stand. She indicated then that she would say that it was important to Hernandez for her to get rid of a box from the basement and that she took efforts to conceal it as she took it out of the home, contradicting testimony she made before the grand jury. Prosecutors have indicated the box held evidence or even the weapon used to kill Lloyd, which has never been found.

Jenkins wasn’t asked in detail about the box on the witness stand Friday but is likely to be asked about it on Monday.

As she walked away from the stand following questioning, she mouthed something to Hernandez as she passed the defense table, her face looking ashen.

Later, in front of the jury, she said she once saw a gun in a junk drawer in the kitchen. When shown an example of a Glock .45, the kind of gun prosecutors say was the murder weapon, she testified it was the same color and shape but she was unsure if

it was the same size.

Police went to the home the night of June 17, 2013, after finding Lloyd’s body with a key to a Hernandez rental car in his pocket.

Jenkins said she asked Hernandez what was going on.

“Do you recall what he said to you?” prosecutor William McCauley asked.

“He didn’t know,” she replied.

Jenkins testified she put their daughter in the car and drove Hernandez to the police station that night. Soon after, she said, he asked her to meet Wallace and give him money. She drove to Rhode Island and met him early on June 18.

“He asked me if I was OK,” Jenkins said. “He let me know that everything is going to be OK.”

She said he then asked her for a certain amount of money, although she didn’t remember how much. She said she gave him \$500, the maximum she could withdraw from an ATM.

“I remember telling him to be safe,” she said. “That’s about it.”

Among the people in the courtroom was her younger sister, Shaneah Jenkins, a 23-year-old law student, who sat next to Lloyd’s mother.

Shayanna Jenkins, when asked by the prosecutor if she is close with her sister, took a long pause, then shook her head, saying they are “estranged, kind of.”

Lavin out as St. John’s basketball coach

NEW YORK (AP) — Steve Lavin’s 5-year tenure as coach at St. John’s was bookended by NCAA Tournament appearances. Every season brought at least 20 wins.

That wasn’t enough to see him finish his original 6-year contract as Lavin and St. John’s “mutually agreed to part ways.”

The announcement came Friday, a week after the Red Storm capped a 21-12 season with a loss to San Diego State in the round of

64 in the NCAA Tournament.

Rumors circulated earlier in the week that the sides were close to agreeing on a contract extension. Those were put to rest with Friday’s announcement.

“Coach Lavin returned high expectations to our men’s basketball program and represented St. John’s in a positive way,” athletic director Chris Monasch said.

Lavin compiled an 81-55 record in his five seasons at St. John’s, but it was the postseason

results that stood out for the wrong reasons. The Red Storm went 2-9 under Lavin in the Big East Tournament, NCAA Tournament and NIT. The outgoing senior class went 0-4 in the Big East Tournament, which is played at Madison Square Garden, the Red Storm’s home court.

“In life change is inevitable, so I take the long view. I’m grateful for my time teaching at St. John’s University,” Lavin said.

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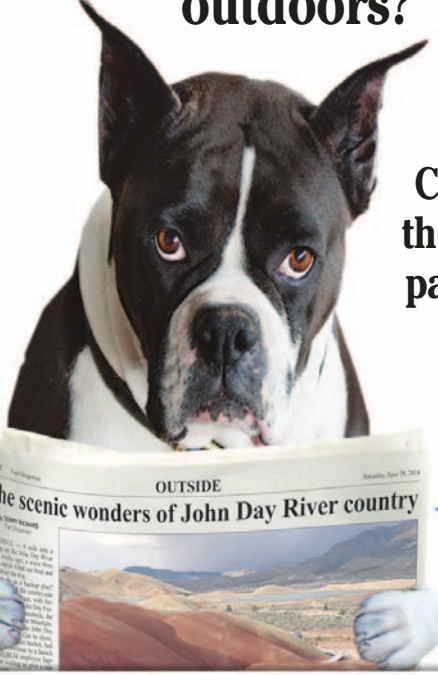
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