



Chet White | UK Athletics

With Jayden Quaintance now healthy, the Kentucky roster is nearly up to full health.

PLAN

FROM **PAGE B1**

a mouse or keyboard

Disaster nearly struck thrice for the Cats when Lowe left the floor inside State Farm Arena in Atlanta after just seconds on the court, seemingly clutching his shoulder again. Kentucky would go on to struggle offensively before Lowe made his return in the second half and led the Cats to a come-from-behind victory.

“We had like 15 minutes in the second half where we had the crew together, and it was extraordinary,” Kentucky Head Coach Mark Pope said. “The coaching got way easier, actually.”

Suffice to say, the health of Lowe, as fragile as it is, is paramount for the success of the Wildcats.

It’s for this reason that Pope was candid about the approach to managing Lowe’s health and well-being during his Monday radio show.

“Jaland is looking terrific. We’re just being cautious with him,” Pope said. “For the rest of the season, we’ll probably keep him around somewhat limited full-contact reps, but he’s gotten some in over the last two days. He’s looked really good.”

Pope would clarify that this is not a minutes restriction, but a contact restriction, saying that when the former Panther has a “tired body” is when he’s most “exposed.” Certainly he’ll be a tired body in games, but that’s a risk the Wildcats have to be willing to take whereas practice can be a bit more controlled.

This also explains why Lowe hasn’t been starting despite being such a key piece for the Wildcats.

“We’re trying to limit his contact and exposure so much in practice,” Pope said. “The thinking behind that (starting lineup) is like, let’s protect the integrity of the group that we have getting most of the reps in practice to actually be able to go perform on the court, just to give some continuity.”

The 1996 National Champion would admit he doesn’t know if that is the right approach to handle an injury like Lowe’s, but it’s what the team has decided to do.

“Clearly, Jaland Lowe is a massively important key to this team, and we function better on the court when he’s on the floor, for sure,” Pope said. “We’ll kind of continue to weigh and try to strike the right balance with keeping him as healthy and as protected as we can, and also get him on the court as much as we can.”

This is also something that Pope seemed to double down on during

his Tuesday press conference to preview Kentucky’s conference opener with Alabama, though he didn’t say it directly.

When discussing the practice of the team and namely returning big man Jayden Quaintance, who made his debut for the Cats against St. John’s, Pope’s words felt very deliberate regarding Lowe’s practice agenda.

“We just had three practices in 36 hours and JQ was in every single moment of live play,” Pope said. “J-Lowe was in all the things we wanted him to be in and then he was doing some extra conditioning on the side. Both of those guys are doing great.”

A good thing to hear for Kentucky fans about their point guard, but also a very telling thing which confirmed what the UK head coach had said the day prior.

For JQ, full participation is a plus, but as far as Lowe is concerned, specific drills and sets are good enough and conditioning will fill in the rest.

Despite that, Pope also had an interesting answer when asked about how the team will approach a tough SEC schedule with the knowledge that one wrong hit could put Lowe out of commission.

“Fearless and smart,” Pope said. “I heard this great quote that I love so much. ‘Fear is a liar.’ I’m actually totally into this right now. Fear is a liar. So we’re going to do it fearless and smart and that’s the way he’s approaching it.”

To his credit, despite concerns regarding whether or not Lowe could opt to just shut himself down and heal his shoulder at one point, Kentucky’s point guard has expressed a competitive spirit.

Nowhere was this more evident than in his response when put in front of a crowd after Kentucky’s lopsided loss to Gonzaga in Nashville in which UK fans booed their own team. Lowe had made his return in the game for the second time this season and, when asked about what that meant to him, he offered his response.

“It felt good to be out there... I don’t take for granted the game of basketball anymore,” he said. “Any chance I can go out there and play the spot I love, I’m gonna go do it. No matter win or loss. I hate losing, I just want to play.”

For better or for worse, playing and playing fearlessly seems to be the path forward for Pope and Lowe.

UK will tipoff with No. 14 Alabama inside Coleman Coliseum to kickoff SEC play at 11 a.m. CST on Saturday, January 3. The game will air live on ESPN with Lowe expected to suit up for the Wildcats.

CFS

FROM **PAGE B1**

squad. He buried a pair of threes within the first minute, and finished at the rim a few times to make the score 53-18.

Also in the third, Daxton Kite bounced back after a quick second quarter with seven in the third, using his size to rise over the top of defenders for baskets inside. Josh Pirtle was the only Bulldog to score a field goal in the frame, picking up four points off a floater and offensive rebound. This made the score 61-22 with just one period remaining.

With the running clock in effect and the reserves seeing a majority of the action, not much scoring occurred in the final minutes. CFS scored just 10 to Fulton City’s seven, with the final score ultimately being 71-29.

Josh Pirtle led the Bulldogs in scoring with eight. Jalen Daniels, CJ Carey, and Jamarion Jackson just behind him with seven points each.

The ball movement was impressive on Tuesday for the Eagles. Seven players scored five or more points, three of which hit double figures throughout the contest. Elijah Grigg led the way with 24, followed by Kite with 13. Cates rounded out scorers in double figures with 10.

“We wanted to focus on penetrating and kicking the ball and swing-



WILL MUITER | The Sun

Josh Pirtle led the Bulldogs with eight points in their loss to CFS on Tuesday night.

ing it around, and just get a little more ball movement to open up the floor,” Kite said. “It’s great when you can have several guys in double figures. It’s good that you can get eight or nine guys scoring with three of them in double figures it was a great win.”

Fulton City is still searching for their first win after their first 10 games, and will look to get that come January 2 when they play Heritage Christian Academy.

SEE **CFS/PAGE B5**

YANTKO

FROM **PAGE B1**

groundbreaking of the 3,000-square-foot Jim & Sue Cash Baseball Clubhouse at Johnny Reagan Field, which features a new locker room, lounge, meeting space and training room. Additional improvements include a new scoreboard, outfield wall, drainage system and a massive videoboard slated for installation ahead of the 2026 season.

Looking ahead, Yantko said future projects include a new videoboard and turf at Roy Stewart Stadium and the newly announced Sandra Hartmann Press Box at Racer Field.

Off the field, student-athletes continue to excel academically and in the community. During the 2025 Civic Engagement Day, Racers logged a school-record 610 hours of community service. In the classroom, the department posted a 3.17 GPA, extending its streak of maintaining a 3.0 departmental GPA to 43 consecutive semesters.

“We are beyond thankful for our student-athletes, coaches and staff for the com-

mitment to excellence in the classroom,” Yantko said.

Yantko also welcomed Learfield as Murray State’s new multimedia rights partner through a 10-year agreement designed to enhance revenue generation, fan engagement and sponsorship opportunities.

Finally, Yantko encouraged fans to begin planning for postseason basketball, including State Farm Arch Madness in St. Louis and the Credit

Union 1 MVC Women’s Basketball Tournament in Coralville, Iowa, noting discounted ticket options and a designated team hotel for the men’s tournament.

“We are making an incredible amount of progress together,” Yantko concluded. “We will stay laser focused on driving forward the nationally recognized Murray State as we head into what will be an incredible athletics year in 2026. ... The best is yet to come.”

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