

Linebacker Landyn Watson wants to prove doubters wrong

BY LARRY VAUGHT
Contributing Writer

Marshall transfer Landyn Watson could play a “big” role for the Kentucky defense this season.

The 6-1, 245-pound Texas native started his collegiate career at Texas Christian for two years before transferring to Marshall for the 2023 and 2024 season where he started 11 games and had 65 tackles, including four tackles for loss and three quarterback hurries.

Watson does not figure to start for defensive coordinator Brad White but he’s bigger than projected starters Alex Afari and Daveren Rayner and his added weight could be important to stopping SEC offenses.

Watson feels he has “great brothers” on the team who have welcomed him with open arms just like the coaching staff has.

“I was able to basically come in and get adjusted pretty quickly with the help of the coaching staff and the players here and the staff around the building,” Watson said. “Coach White is like being around a defensive mastermind. I see that as a blessing being able to learn more football knowledge, and just learn more about the game, from him.

“He knows a lot about the game, but so do all the coaches. So just being able to be around them and kind of pick their brains is something I have really liked.”

Watson was an ESPN four-star recruit coming out of high school in Austin, Texas, and redshirted his second season at TCU in 2022 when the team advanced to the national title game. He had offers from LSU, Notre Dame, Tennessee, Michigan State, Penn State and others when he signed with TCU.

“Obviously coming into a new locker room, you



Marshall transfer Landyn Watson was not worried that UK went 4-8 last season when he decided to play for the Cats. (Landyn Watson Instagram photo)

have definitely got to earn the respect of your peers. But I feel like I earn the respect of my peers by the way I work, not what I say,” the Marshall transfer said. “So I feel like once the guys were able to see me busting my tail and able to perform on the field, that’s when you get the leadership role,” he said.

“I try to lead by example, not too much by telling people what to do and what not to do. Just try to be the guy that tries to set the right example on and off the field. I play with relentless effort and I want fans to know every time I am on the field they will get my all.”

Watson understands how frustrating a 4-8 season was for UK last year. His first season at Marshall the team went 6-7 and then came back to win the Sun Belt Conference championship in 2024.

“We wore 6-7 shirts all season at Marshall to remind us that we did not want to feel that way again,” Watson said. “That’s why Kentucky’s record last year did not con-

cern me at all.”

Watson’s journey has not been easy. He originally committed to LSU but then flipped to TCU because he could not make an official visit to LSU during COVID and he had been to TCU multiple times.”

He played sparingly his first three years — two at TCU, one at Marshall — and admits it was a “humbling” experience that will motivate him at UK.

“I think every highly recruited player expects to play right away and not getting to play was very humbling,” Watson said. “Now I want to prove people wrong and show I can play in the SEC.”

Watson believes Stoops and his staff are as motivated as he is and want to see a dramatic improvement in this year’s team.

“The little things that they probably let slide last year, they’re not letting slide this year. I like that,”

he said. “All the coaching staff seem to have a chip on their shoulder and so do us players as well because we know we’re better than a lot of o people think.

“I feel like everything happens for a reason. I feel like everything fell into place at the perfect time. I’m here for a reason and want to make the best of my opportunity while I’m here. I’m definitely playing with some dogs, some people whose backstory is a lot deeper than mine. It all makes you want to work a little harder for them and their struggles.

“So we just want to be able to put all of our struggles together on defense and dominate offenses in the SEC is my goal. A lot of us are anxious to get out there and perform and show guys what we are capable of.”

JASPER READY TO HONOR PAST AND PRESENT

Jasper Johnson has played in all-star showcase games across the country since his Overtime Elite season ended and even spent a week in California training with some of the nation’s elite high school and college players, including Duke’s Cooper Flagg.

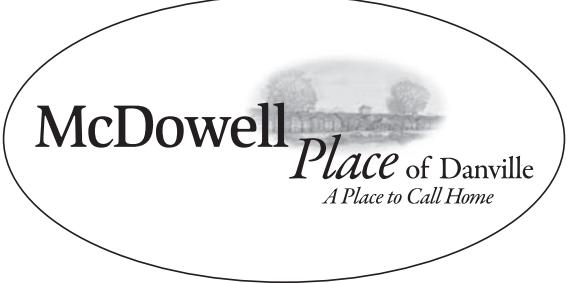
Johnson is now on campus at Kentucky starting to prepare for his freshman season under coach Mark Pope. However, he recently held a free meet-and-greet with Kentucky fans at Playa Bowl in Lexington.

“It was really, really good,” Johnson said. “Got to meet a lot of fans and signing autographs for some people was really cool. There are a lot of good people in the city who have supported me and people also came from other places.

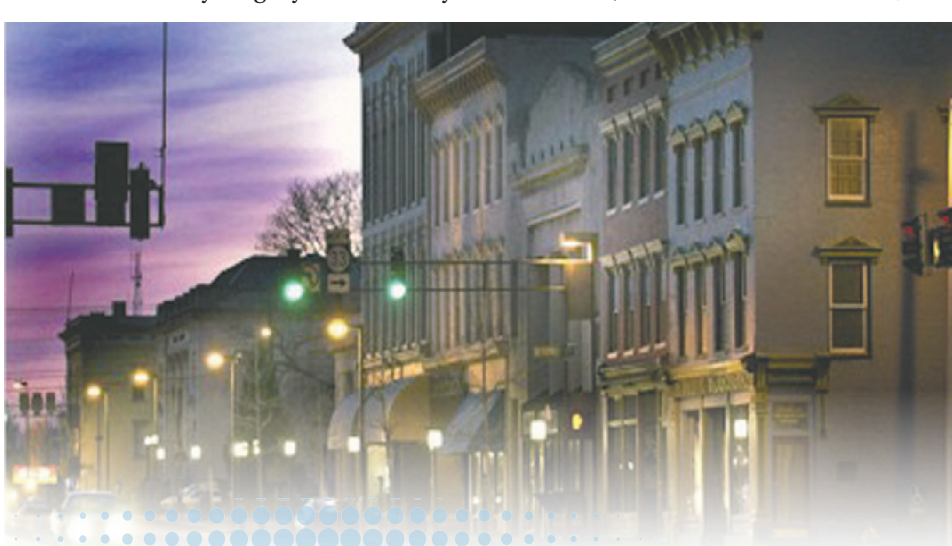
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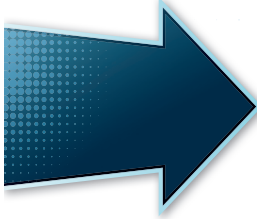
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