

# Genuine UK coaches impressed 5-star Savvy Swords

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Savvy Swords had her choice of where she wanted to play her college basketball but ultimately picked Kentucky and coach Kenny Brooks over UCLA, South Carolina, Notre Dame and Michigan (her sister, Sylva, was Michigan's leading scorer last season as a freshman).

Swords, a five-star wing, is ranked in the top 10 in her recruiting class but felt Brooks' coaching style was perfect for her.

"You could tell that his players play very free and that they aren't really stressed or restrained when they play," said Swords.

She also liked that UK coaches told her they were open to letting her try new things to improve her game and the relationships she felt with the coaches were "authentic and not forced" like it was at some schools.

"It's really easy to be fake on stuff like that, but it felt like they were being genuine," she said.

The 6-foot-2 wing out of Long Island Lutheran High School in New York missed most of her junior season because of a knee injury. She's also a stand-out for AAU club Kia Nurse Elite and the Canadian junior national team, where she helped her team win a silver medal in the 2024 U17 World Cup when she averaged 16.3 points, 6.0 rebounds and 2.3 assists per game.

Swords is on one of the nation's best high school teams and another appeal at Kentucky was the verbal commitment of five-star point guard Maddyn Greenway, another top 10 national recruit.

"I really like what they are building by bringing in Maddyn and what they already have there," Swords said. "It's really exciting to be part of the next generation of Kentucky basketball on the women's side and I want to be part of that. I committed early because I just didn't see any reason to wait."

Swords made all her official visits, including one to Kentucky last fall, and didn't feel her college choice was rushed.

"I had enough time to really think about it and I wanted to get it out of the way so I could just enjoy my senior year and just play freely," the UK commit said.

She relied on her older sister's recruiting experiences to help her. She didn't ask a lot of questions but said she carefully observed what went on with her sister.

"I was on her phone calls to see kind of what

she was looking for when she was making her decision just to see what her main values were," Swords said. "I want to be like her. I also have the same values, so that kind of helped me a lot. The last two weeks of my recruitment before I committed, I talked to her because I trust her the most out of anyone in the world. Just hearing her opinion and what she had to say, that really helped me get a clear head."

Swords admits growing up she thought her best college basketball option likely would be Laurentian University in her hometown of Greater Sudbury, Ontario. Her mother and father both played basketball there and her father also was the men's head coach at Laurentian.

"We would always go to games there. I was like, 'I am gonna play her one day.' Then about a year ago was when I thought maybe I could play in the United States," Swords said. "Things just kind of opened up with a lot of higher level schools reaching out. I honestly had no idea where I wanted to go until the last two months of my recruiting. That's when I started to narrow it down and Kentucky turned out to be the right choice."

Swords tore her ACL in December and had surgery in January. She's not fully recovered but expects a full recovery before her high school senior season starts. Swords admits rehab was "definitely hard" initially but did get easier.

"PT (physical therapy) just became another workout. I'm still working, still benefiting from what I'm doing. When I was able to start shooting again and doing more core stuff, it definitely helped a lot because I could tell I was getting better and I know very soon I will be back out there doing what I love to do."

## INJURED QUAINANCE STILL MAKING IMPACT ON COURT

Sophomore Jayden Quaintance is still recovering from a knee injury suffered late in his freshman season at Arizona State last season but he's making his presence felt at Kentucky.

He averaged 2.6 blocked shots per game last year despite being only a 17-year-old freshman. Quaintance has vowed to be ready to play early in the upcoming season even though UK coach Mark Pope continues to preach patience to make sure he's fully ready for Southeastern Conference play.

However, nothing is wrong with Quaintance's voice and point guard Jaland Lowe says he's

talking a lot while watching his teammates practice.

"He's been talking crazy to us. He's like, 'Y'all lucky. I'm gonna be out here blocking y'all's shots, too.' He's like, 'Y'all know I was leading the country in blocks before I got hurt,'" Lowe said.

"We were like, 'Yeah, we'll see when you get out here. You're gonna have to prove it to us.'"

However, Lowe suspects he's going to back up his words, especially since he's being projected as a lottery pick in the 2026 NBA Draft.

"How naturally he is just in his body — it's like, 'Yeah, that guy's gonna be really special.' Hands are huge. Length," Lowe said. "Just a big body. So that's going to be amazing when he comes back. I'm ready to play one on one against him."

Quaintance knows he's not the only defensive threat Kentucky has this season.

"I feel like we could be one of the best defensive teams in the country," Quaintance said. "We have a really long team. We have a lot of height and length on our team."

"We have people pushing full court, guarding full court. We have people in the backcourt in gaps, in help, in rotations, and we have a really good chance to be special this year defensively."

## WASHINGTON'S HONESTY IMPRESSES PLEDGES

First-year receivers coach L'Damian Washington has been able to help persuade four receivers — Denarius Gray, Dallas Dickerson, Prince Jean and Davis McCray — to verbally commit to Kentucky despite UK's 4-8 finish in 2024.

He's been able to do that by convincing them that the culture of Kentucky football really has changed from last year and will continue to be better.

"I think you have to be transparent and honest (with recruits), and I think you have to just make sure that the leaders in your locker room continue to uphold the values of the head coach," Washington said. "When you get that, everybody's going all in together. In a sense that's easier said than done. But when the common goal is team first and if you take the selfishness out of it, that's what you get."

Players being paid can create splits in the locker room/culture but Washington said the "money piece" has not been a problem during his short time at Kentucky.

See **VIEWS**, on 10



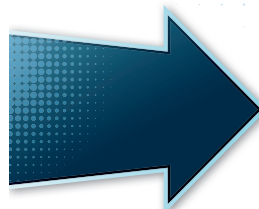
Top 10 player Savvy Swords likes what coach Kenny Brooks is building at Kentucky. (UK Athletics photo)



Jayden Quaintance can be an intimidating shot blocker but says UK has a lot of tremendous defensive players this season. (Photo by Larry Vaught)



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