

Voted Kentucky's best weekly Sports Column



"Big Red Bird Flies toward Eastern Kentucky"

By Derek Fugate
Times-Voice Sports
Photos: Derek Fugate



Mikel Brown Jr. with the slam dunk

There are so many teams fighting for that 8-11 seed in the NCAA Tournament right now that it makes it very hard, and no room for error. As I've said time and time before, only time will tell and the Cardinals control their own destiny. The bucket is nearly full,

but there's still room for a little movement, just ask the Wildcats which finally got back into the AP Top-25 this week, and according to Bracketology experts, they're a "lock" for the NCAA Tournament. This is about to get very interesting. Go Cards!



"Louie", the Cardinal mascot shoots out T-shirts out to the KFC Yum! Center crowd

Louisville stayed No.24 this week in the AP Top-25 rankings, despite winning both of its games last week and getting a Quad-1 win on the road at Wake Forest. The real reason for not moving up in the rankings was that Notre Dame basically pulled Louisville down. However, Louisville will have two more chances this week at Quad-1 opportunities as the Cardinals host the Wolf Pack of NC State on ESPN's *Big Monday*, followed by a neutral site road test with Baylor.

With Louisville being ranked No. 24 this week, these games are must wins for the Cardinals to stay afloat. There will be some in-state competition with the Kentucky Wildcats right behind Louisville at No. 25, a big road win at Florida would see the Cats jump the Cards next week.

The ACC is sure hard to figure out now that North Carolina defeated Duke last week. I sure didn't think that would happen and I still think the Tar Heels are very overrated at No. 11 this week, but that sure leaves a huge opportunity for the Cardinals when they travel to the *Dean Dome* in Chapel Hill two weeks from today.

"Who'd think it two weeks ago"

By James David Fugate
Times-Voice Sports
Photos: Derek Fugate



Coach Mark Pope

Many of those comprising BBN had given up on Kentucky, especially after the Wildcats' unthinkable 25-point thrashing at the hands of Vanderbilt a mere two weeks ago. Not only would the Cats not make the field of 68 come Selection Sunday, they wouldn't be selected for the NIT, either. It was that bad with Coach Pope's expected excommunication coming prior to season's end. Oh, but how the tables have turned with Kentucky's recent wins over Arkansas, Oklahoma and Tennessee.

Appearing as if they might not win another game in the SEC after departing Memorial Gymnasium with heads hanging low two weeks ago, the Wildcats have since positioned themselves with an opportunity to take the top spot, or tie for the lead in the conference with a win over Florida Saturday in Gainesville. Kentucky's upsurge may have come as a surprise to those who've followed the Cats through their highs and lows thus far this season, but media experts (Is that not an oxymoron?) picked Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Arkansas to finish in that order in a preseason poll. As of this writing, the top five are Florida (8-2), Kentucky (8-3), Arkansas (7-3), Texas A&M (7-3), with four teams tied for the fifth spot at 6-4 (Vanderbilt, Tennessee, Alabama and Missouri).

Of course in standings it's the numbers in the loss column that's more significant than the numbers in the win column; after all, a game that

is yet to be played can result in either a win or a loss, while a loss is irretrievable. With that being said, only two games separate the top eight teams in the SEC in the loss column. And with seven more games to be played for Kentucky, as compared to eight contests for the other seven in the top-eight, there are way too many variables at this point to select a conference champion.

Kentucky's upcoming seven-game stretch could be the most difficult when compared to the others with a legitimate shot at the SEC regular season crown. The three games at home (Georgia, Vandy, Florida), coupled with four on the road (Florida, Auburn, South Carolina, Texas A&M), look to be daunting challenges for a Wildcat team which has most recently played its best ball against the better teams, while having tendencies of not showing up for games in which its heavily favored, ala Missouri.

No win is an easy win on the road in the SEC, especially for the one with the letters K-E-N-T-U-C-K-Y on its jersey. As a result, trips to College Station, Columbia,

and "The Loveliest Village on the Plains" may prove to be larger obstacles than the higher profile matchups with the Gators and Commodores, teams for which the Wildcats will surely be prepared. Winning the conference outright this year would surely be a huge turnaround for a Kentucky team which has struggled with its identity; however, securing a double-bye in the upcoming SEC Tournament might be a more realistic goal heading into postseason play. Needless to say, don't repeat that to the Wildcats, which have already proven a lot of the home folks wrong.

Prognosticators have the Wildcats as a lock in the field of 68 with their present body of work, which now includes five Quad One wins, giving BBN a chance to relax a bit, but not for long, not with the matchup with Florida Saturday afternoon in Gainesville. The Wildcats are not only playing for a conference championship, they're looking to up their seeding position, as well as securing a closer-to-home venue in the big dance come March. Who'd think it two weeks ago?

**STIVERS'S
SENATE
BILL 6
PROPOSES
\$150
MILLION
FOR RESEARCH
EXCELLENCE
AND ECONOMIC
GROWTH**

FRANKFORT, Ky.—Senate Bill (SB) 6, sponsored by Senate President Robert Stivers, R-Manchester, proposes a historic \$150 million investment in Kentucky's research infrastructure. The bill, if passed, would allocate general fund dollars for fiscal year 2027 to the Endowed Research Fund established under KRS 164.038, reinforcing the legislature's commitment to innovation, higher education and long-term economic growth.

The funding will be distributed evenly across the five research consortium accounts authorized by statute. Each account supports a unique research partnership among Kentucky's public universities, selected by the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) based on collaborative proposals. Under the

law, each research consortium receives funding for a five-year term.

SB 6 builds on the framework established by Senate Bill 1 from the 2024 Regular Session, which created the Endowed Research Fund and directed the Council on Postsecondary Education to select and support five high-impact research consortia. That legislation laid the groundwork for long-term collaboration among public universities; SB 6 now provides the necessary funding to activate that vision and move research efforts forward across the commonwealth.

"Senate Bill 6 is about creating long-term opportunity," Stivers said. "By investing in high-quality research and fostering collaboration among our universities, we strengthen Kentucky's economy, attract top-tier talent and ensure our institutions remain competitive nationwide."

CPE is responsible for soliciting and reviewing applications submitted jointly by two or more public universities. Applications are evaluated using established criteria, and selected consortia are assigned to dedicated accounts within the Endowed Research Fund.

In addition to advancing Kentucky's research capacity, SB 6 ensures that any unspent funds will

carry forward into the next fiscal year. This flexibility allows institutions to plan strategically and maximize the long-term impact of each investment.

Because of the bill's importance to the state's economic and educational future, the legislation carries an emergency provision, meaning it would take effect immediately upon its filing with the Secretary of State's Office.

Senate President Robert Stivers, R-Manchester, represents the 25th Senate District, which includes Clay, Jackson, Knox, McCreary, Owsley, and Whitley Counties. Stivers has served as Kentucky Senate president for over a decade. He first assumed the position in 2013, succeeding former Senate President David Williams. As Senate President, Stivers chairs the Senate Committee on Committees and the Rules Committee and is co-chair of the Legislative Research Commission. He is also a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.



**Wesley files House Bill
to ease residential access
for disabled veterans**

Frankfort, Kentucky (Week of January 22, 2026)- This week, Representative Bill Wesley of Ravenna presented HB 214 during the first meeting of Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection. This legislation further demonstrates Wesley's ongoing commitment to our veterans.

Sponsored by Wesley, HB 214 creates the Residential Ease of Access for Disabled Veterans Program within the Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs to fund the construction and installation of ADA-compliant accessibility ramps at the residence of disabled veterans. The measure creates a dedicated grant fund to receive state appropriations and private donations to fund the construction.

"My friend, Staff Sergeant Kasey

Keeney served overseas. Kasey came back home and got injured. After getting injured Kasey couldn't get a ramp for his house," Wesley said. "Kasey's story inspired me to write this legislation because I never want another one of our veterans do without, or have to beg for resources that they are entitled to."

"I do not believe that our men and women should go fight overseas and then come home and be forced to fight for benefits that they are entitled to. As long as I am State Representative and the Vice Chair of Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection, I will continue to fight for our veterans," Wesley added. "By enacting this legislation, the General Assembly would establish a first-of-its-kind wheelchair program within the Commonwealth

