

Williams knew coming to UK could help him reach NBA

BY LARRY VAUGHT
Contributing Writer

Kam Williams' transfer to Kentucky from Tulane did not create a huge buzz in the Bluegrass when he made his decision in late March before the college basketball season even ended.

The 6-foot-8 wing ranked as the 24th best player in the transfer portal and fourth best small forward by 247Sports. He averaged 9.3 points, 4.5 rebounds and 1.3 assists per game as a true freshman at Tulane while shooting 48.5 percent from the field, 41.2 percent from 3 and 76 percent at the foul line.

However, before he's even played a game at UK, he's been projected as the sixth pick in the 2026 NBA Draft by NBADraft.net to more than justify the potential UK coach Mark Pope and his staff saw immediately in Williams when he went into the transfer portal.

One reason Williams was attracted to UK immediately after leaving Tulane was Kentucky's history of sending players to the NBA. "They sent the most pros to the league, so their culture and their coaching is going to help me get to the place that I want to be," said Williams when he was being projected as a possible late first-round pick in 2026. "My goal is to get to the NBA, so I really thought coming here, it could really help me. I just have to keep doing what I'm doing now because that's what got me here in the first place. There is no point in trying to step out of my comfort zone. If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Williams understands there are no guarantees about future success and understands what he needs to do this season. "I can grow in every aspect of basketball because I haven't perfected anything," Williams said. "So shooting, defense, IQ, just everything really needs to increase."

He's also boosted by the love his father, Greg Williams Sr., has for Kentucky basketball already.

"Really, everyone loves him. He's doing TikTok dancing and reposting stuff on Twitter and all that," Williams said. "I'm glad he's building a bond with BBN early."

Here are other insights Williams shared about now being at UK:

Question: Have you noticed a difference in BBN and the kind of culture that it is?

Williams: "It's bigger than a lot of schools, just kind of everybody embraces you. I remember whenever I committed, everybody was like tagging me on Instagram, Twitter, texting me a bunch of stuff. I wasn't expecting that to happen, but it shows that they really care about their players a lot."

Question: What was your perception of coach Mark Pope before you got here?

Williams: "I really didn't know how he was as a coach at first because I was still at my old school and wasn't really paying attention that much. But now I see that he really is relaxed, cares about his players a lot, loves his guys, and he wants us to be great."

Question: How good of a shooter are you?

Williams: "I shoot every day, so I try to shoot my best number. I don't really know what number, but I really work hard a lot at shooting."

Question: Do you think it will surprise people when they see just how good a shooter you are?

Williams: "I would say that most people might kind of doubt the numbers



Kam Williams impressed coach Mark Pope with his play in a scrimmage against La Familia, UK's alumni team. (UK Athletics photo)

or whatever, but I'm not really worried about the outside noise because I know what I'm capable of. Not gonna try to make it bigger than whatever it is because that's when doubt and fear and all that comes in. I just want to keep humble, confident."

Question: Who has helped you the most to develop the shot you have?

Williams: "I started playing basketball at 4, 5 or something like that. Ever since then, my dad has kind of been teaching me different mechanics to help me get my shot perfect. I'm shooting faster now and holding my follow through more."

Question: Was your dad one of those guys who wouldn't let you shoot further behind the 3-point or the free throw line when you were younger so you didn't mess up your form?

Williams: "I had to stay in the paint. As I got older and got stronger, he let me back up over the years."

Question: What's the process for getting up to speed with the Mark Pope system? What are the some of the steps that you went through to understand how he coaches?

Williams: "I would say running harder in transition and really picking up on the knowledge that he's given us. You learn because if you take longer than a day or two to learn certain concepts, then you're going to fall behind everybody else who's picking it up. Just being a student of the game is going to help."

Question: What do you like about Arizona State transfer Jayden Quaintance? And what do you think that's going to be like when he gets back to full speed from his knee injury?

Williams: "Like everyone saw last year, when he gets back on the court we will have a player that can really defend the goal for us. I feel like this is going to be a really good defensive team. We can switch one through five so we can guard everyone. I feel like this team's gonna be a better defensive team than last year's team."

"You are not going to drive by Otega (Oweh) or Mo. You are not getting to the goal against them. They are both very strong and burly. I am trying to find different ways to go against them but it's not easy."

Question: What do you expect the transition to UK from Tulane to be like?

Williams: "Really just finding different ways to kind of take driving angles and different closeouts and stuff like that. You know, getting stronger, getting faster because it is a different competition in the SEC than the AAC."

UK VOLLEYBALL HAS SIGHTS SET ON NATIONAL TITLE

Kentucky won its only volleyball national championship in 2020 but coach Craig Skinner's players believe they have the potential to win another national title this season.

"I think it's a hard thing to do but we're ready to do it this year," junior libero Molly Tuozzo said. "We've already put in so much work and we had the great opportunity to get all of our transfers and freshmen here in the spring and we used that time to grow closer to each other and play for each other."

"We are all so bought into each other and the team that it's a super exciting year for us. I think we're not done yet and we just want to keep getting closer and eventually win a national championship."

Marquette transfer Molly Berezowitz had a sister, Maddie Berezowitz, on UK's national championship team.

"It's not going to go perfect. There's going to be setbacks, but how can we come back from that and have that goal in mind that we want to win the national championship," Berezowitz said.

Kentucky has won or shared eight straight Southeastern Conference titles. League coaches picked UK No. 1 in the preseason poll and sophomore Asia Thigpen said winning the conference is also important to the team.

"Our expectation this season is to win the SEC championship, both the tournament and the (regular season). I think you check that off and we want to go for a national championship," Thigpen said.

Returning players got to learn from UK assistant coach Madison Lilley, the nation's outstanding player when UK won its national championship.

"Mads talked to us about what that looked like in practices," Thigpen said. "She talked about how every day, it was just competing. She stressed the importance of winning every single drill and then everyone's roles are super important."

Skinner doesn't mind the national championship talk and aspirations. He even admitted he put the schedule together with that in mind.

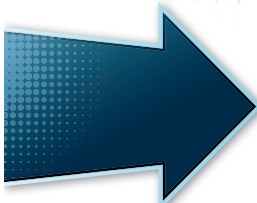
"Do we schedule tough because we know we have some great players and have a chance to end the year competing for a national championship?" Skinner said. "It is what we typically do, maybe even a little bit tougher, all four of the Final Four teams from last year are on our schedule. But I do not feel like we will get to where we want to go if we don't play these teams."



Junior libero Molly Tuozzo, left, believes UK can win the national championship this season. (Photo by Vicky Graff)



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