



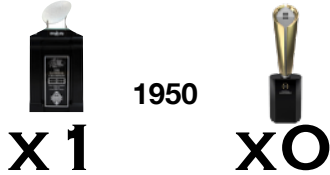
# KENTUCKY WILDCATS

SEC - East Division

## Revamped Wildcats Ready to Surprise

### KENTUCKY BIO

National Championships - 1



SEC Championships: 2  
(Last Won: 1976)

Location: Lexington, KY

All-Time Record: 522-571-36

2022 Results: 7-6  
Lost in Music City Bowl

Head Coach: Mark Stoops  
11th Year (66-59)

After a remarkable 10-win season in 2021, the Wildcats came back to earth with a relatively disappointing 7-6 season. Despite not reaching expectations, Mark Stoops guided Kentucky to its seventh straight bowl appearance which is the longest streak in program history. Stoops is arguably the program's best head coach of all time (although Bear Bryant did have a couple of very noteworthy seasons in the '70s) and does have the most wins. The Wildcats opened the season a perfect 4-0 which included a big road victory over Florida. They were ranked as high as #7 in the AP Poll, their highest ranking since 1977, but fell to #14 Mississippi on the road and lost to South Carolina the very next week. They dropped three more games to Tennessee, Vanderbilt, and Georgia and the season ended on a painful, lackluster performance in the Music City Bowl (0-21 vs. Iowa). Stoops wasn't be satisfied with last year's result and hit the portal hard to get the Wildcats back on track in 2023.

While NFL scouts salivated over the potential of quarterback Will Levis, the actual results on the field were inconsistent and his performance against the top teams in the SEC was unsatisfactory. To his credit, the Kentucky offensive line had all kinds of problems providing protection and a dominant run game that averaged 200 yards in 2021 fell precipitously to just 116 yards in 2022 due to similar issues up front. Levis finished the season with 2,406 yards, 19 touchdowns, and 10 interceptions. Even though the Wildcats lose a player drafted in the second round to Tennessee, the quarterback play could actually be better this season with heralded transfer Devin Leary. Leary had a breakout season in 2021 with North Carolina State and led the Wolf Pack to a nine-win season. Expectations for the Wolf Pack were sky high but, after a 5-1 start, Leary was injured and missed the rest of the season. He last played an SEC opponent in 2021 when he threw for over 300 yards against Mississippi State.

Just a year after Chris Rodriguez broke the school record for rushing yards in a season (1,379), his production dropped to 904 yards after he was suspended for the first four games of the season. He finishes his career as the third all-time rusher in program history (3,644 yards) and will be difficult to replace. Stoops grabbed 1,000-yard rusher Ray Davis out of the portal from Vanderbilt and he actually had 26 carries for 129 yards and a touchdown in the Commodores' win over Kentucky last season. JuTahn McClain added 278 yards and La'Veil Wright added 120 yards.

Stoops took an "all hands on deck" approach to the portal and addressing the deficiencies up front. Marques Cox spent his first five seasons with Northern Illinois and other transfers including USC's Courtland Ford and Alabama's Tanner Bowles could make an impact too. Returning starters Jager Burton and Kenneth Horsey should help in that improvement effort. Time will tell if the transfers are able to gel together but the early non-conference slate is extremely manageable and should give the Wildcats plenty of time to figure things out.

Even though the offense often sputtered (just 20.4 points per game), the defense was rock solid and kept the Wildcats in almost every game, even against Georgia. There are only five returning starters but several impact players are back including a very strong linebacker trio of JJ Weaver, Trevin Wallace, and D'eryk Jackson. Of the three main defensive units, the secondary is the most inexperienced but Jordan Lovett is back at safety where he collected 62 tackles and an interception against both Georgia and Louisville. Deone Walker produced immediately as a true freshman and should be on of the conference's best interior linemen.

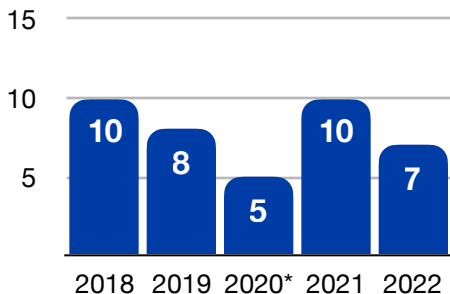
**The Bottom Line:** The success of this season largely hinges on the transfer portal class Stoops brought in, but I really like what he did. The defense should be a strength yet again and I expect more production from the offense and Leary could shine if he's healthy. The Wildcats aren't to the level of Georgia (few teams are), but they are talented enough to make the East division very interesting and they do get Florida, Missouri, and Tennessee at home. They do pull Alabama out of the West but they host the Tide at Kroger Field for the first time in a decade. I am high on this team and they could edge out Tennessee for second place in the East.

**Projection: 9-3 (3rd in SEC East)**

### 2022 Statistics












Points Scored	Rush Yards	Pass Yards	Turnover Margin
20.4	116.2	208.5	-2
112th in FBS	108th in FBS	95th in FBS	T-80th in FBS
Points Allowed	Rush YDS Allowed	Pass YDS Allowed	
19.2	140.6	170.8	
13th in FBS	49th in FBS	7th in FBS	

### 5-YEAR WIN TREND



Kroger Field (61,000)

## 2023 Kentucky Schedule

Week	Date	Team
1	Sat, Sept 2	 vs. Ball State
2	Sat, Sept 9	 vs. E. Kentucky
3	Sat, Sept 16	 vs. Akron
4	Sat, Sept 23	 @ Vanderbilt
5	Sat, Sept 30	 vs. Florida
6	Sat, Oct 7	 @ Georgia
7	Sat, Oct 14	 vs. Missouri
8	Bye Week	
9	Sat, Oct 28	 vs. Tennessee
10	Sat, Nov 4	 @ Mississippi St.
11	Sat, Nov 11	 vs. Alabama
12	Sat, Nov 18	 @ South Carolina
13	Sat, Nov 25	 @ Louisville

Conference Games in Bold

### KEY GAMES

**Sat, Oct 7: @ Georgia** - There's an old adage that goes something like this: "to be the best, you have to beat the best." If that's the case, Kentucky will have to do something they haven't done in 13 previous tries: beat Georgia.

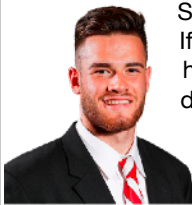
**Sat, Sept 28: vs. Tennessee** - The Volunteers dropped a season-high 44 on the Wildcats otherwise staunch defense. Will some home cooking give the Wildcats the edge they need?

**Sat, Nov 25: @ Louisville** - While there are no reports of the Governor's Cup going away due to conference realignment, it's still worth savoring this matchup. The Wildcats have won the last four meetings since the series was tied at 15 apiece (now UK 19-15).

### KEY PLAYERS

#### Devin Leary - QB

Leary was simply dominant in 2021 and threw for 3,433 yards, 35 touchdowns, and only five interceptions in one of NC State's most successful seasons in program history. If the offensive line can figure out protection, Leary has the arm strength and experience to slice and dice a defense (yes, even an SEC defense). College football fans who are more casual in nature will be surprised when Leary has a more productive season than Will Levis did last season, but those who have followed his career will not.



#### Barion Brown - WR

Brown was sharp in his freshman season and led the Wildcats in receptions (50) and yards (628). He should be even more dangerous this season especially if the passing game evolves. With fellow sophomore Dane Key working the other sideline and receiving attention from the defense, Brown will have an opportunity to work in space and make a big impact for the Wildcats in 2023.



### 2022 RESULTS (7-6)

**Miami (OH) (W 37-13)**  
**@ Florida (W 26-16)**  
**Youngstown State (W 31-0)**  
**No. Illinois (W 31-23)**  
 @ Mississippi (L 19-22)  
 South Carolina (L 14-24)  
**Mississippi St. (W 27-17)**  
 @ Tennessee (L 6-44)  
**@ Missouri (W 21-17)**  
 Vanderbilt (L 21-24)  
 Georgia (L 6-16)  
**Louisville (W 26-13)**  
 Iowa (L 0-21)

**KENTUCKY**

### RECRUITING

2023 Class Ranking

**31st**

(Via 24/7 Sports)