Lawrence Journal-World BIG 12 SPOTLIGHT weekly look inside the conference

Draft day looms

Talib, Kelly emerge as Big 12's most likely first-round picks

By Eric Sorrentino

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It's been 15 years since the Kansas University football team had a player selected in the first round of the NFL

Four days from now Aqib Talib, fresh off his pick-six in KU's 24-21 Orange Bowl victory, will most likely end Dana Stubblefield's 15-year reign as the last Jayhawk taken in Round One.

Talib, along with Oklahoma wide receiver Malcolm Kelly and Texas wide receiver Limas Sweed, are the Big 12's best shots at first-round glory. Oh, and positive news for

KU fans waiting to see where Talib ends up: The draft, which starts at 2 p.m. Saturday, will go by much faster than previous years.

Teams have 10 minutes this year — as opposed to 15 minutes in the past — to make their first-round selections. After the first round, teams will then have seven minutes for their second-round selections and five minutes in rounds three through seven. Perhaps this year, you won't

have to eat breakfast, run errands, mow the yard and hit the links for 18 holes...all before your favorite team

It should be a fairly active Saturday for the Big 12 Conference, which has 15 players predicted to go in the first four rounds by ESPN draft

analyst Mel Kiper, Jr. Here's a preview:

Agib Talib, CB, Kansas

Why teams should care: Sure, the Richardson, Texas, native talks a big game. He also backs it up (11 interceptions the past two seasons with teams often looking the other direction anyway). War room representatives likely will salivate at film of Talib's versatility, which would display the four touchdown passes he caught on offense. The term "big-play ability" gets thrown around loosely, but concrete evidence of Talib fitting the term was present in the 2008 Orange Bowl when Talib jumped a route for an interception and returned the

opening touchdown. Key stats: Talib runs a 4.47second 40 and has a vertical leap of 42 inches.

ball 60 yards for the game's

Kiper's mock draft: No. 10

overall, New Orleans If Kiper's right: Talib would likely start in nickel and dime packages and have a tough time cracking a starting corner spot with newly-acquired Randall Gay and veteran Mike McKenzie around.

Malcolm Kelly, WR, Okla.

Why teams should care: 19 touchdowns and 1,814 yards in the last two years. Kelly has the size at 6-foot-3 and 227 pounds to be a quality possession receiver.

Key stats: The only question mark is his speed. Josh Reed. If Nelson makes Texas; drafted by Carolina.



Nick Krug/Journal-World Photo **Agib Talib, Kansas University**



Malcolm Kelly, Oklahoma

NFL.com reported Kelly clocked a 4.75 and 4.68-second 40, much slower than expected, at his April 9 "Pro Day" workout in Norman. Kiper's mock draft: No. 23

overall, Pittsburgh

If Kiper's right: Kelly would add to a nice receiving corps of Hines Ward (who's 32 years old), Santonio Holmes and Nate Washington.

Limas Sweed, WR, Texas

Why teams should care: Sweed, at 6-4, can win jump balls against opposing cornerbacks more times than not. Combine that with his 4.48second 40 time, and Sweed could be a scary receiver.

touchdown catches rank second all-time at Texas.

Kiper's mock draft: No. 36 overall (second round), New York Iets.

If Kiper's right: Sweed might not replace Laveranues Coles and Jerricho Cotchery his rookie season, but he could make immediate impact as a No. 3 receiver.

Jordy Nelson, WR, K-State

Why teams should care: At 6-3, 217 pounds, Nelson's 4.51second 40 time cannot be

Key stats: His 2007 season line: 122 catches, 1,606 yards, 11 touchdowns. Nelson's season line, just two years ago: 39 catches, 547 yards, one TD.

Kiper's mock position: No. 41 overall (second round),

If Kiper's right: Nelson could work the slot in his first season behind Lee Evans and

immediate impact, how much longer will the Bills wait on Reed? In six seasons, Reed has yet to catch more than 58 passes and two touchdowns in a season. And he's only missed eight games in those

Jamaal Charles, RB, Texas Why teams should care: Charles' speed is simply unmatched. Charles, a former track star, recently clocked a 4.38-second 40. The team that drafts the UT junior will draft a back who can take it the distance on any given play.

Key stats: Averaged 6.3 yards per carry last year, despite carrying the ball 258 times. Compiled 1,619 yards and 18 touchdowns.

Kiper's mock draft: No. 54 overall (second round), Ten-

If Kiper's right: This would be a fascinating development if Charles was re-united with Vince Young on the Titans. If Tennessee drafts Charles, he could start his rookie season as a third-down back and spell incumbent LenDale White.

Martellus Bennett, TE, A&M

Why teams should care: After Dustin Keller (No. 25 overall on Kiper's mock draft) of Purdue, drafting the best tight end is a tossup. Enter Bennett, a 6-7, 253-pound tight

Key stat: Runs a 4.72-second 40. That's in between the times of Oklahoma's Kelly, a

wide receiver. Scary. Kiper's mock draft: No. 56 overall (second round), Green Bay

If Kiper's right: Bennett wouldn't pass Donald Lee (45 catches, 575 yards, six TD's in 2007) on the depth chart overnight, but Green Bay is known for frequently playing two tight ends. Lee played alongside Bubba Franks for a while, and Franks went to the Jets in the offseason.

Jordan Dizon, LB, Colorado

Why teams should care: For Key stats: His 20 career those unfamiliar with Dizon, he registered 463 tackles in his four-year career at CU, good for the eighth best total in NCAA history.

Key stat: Had the most tackles in the nation (173, 13.31 average) last year. Ran a 4.59second 40.

Kiper's mock draft: No. 63 overall (second round), New York Giants

Kiper's mock draft went through round four. The other Big 12 names on it:

73. Reggie Smith, DB, Oklahoma; drafted by Minnesota. 76. Curtis Lofton, LB, Oklahoma; drafted by Detroit.

80. Carl Nicks, OT, Nebraska; drafted by Philadelphia.

88. Anthony Collins, OT, Kansas; drafted by Pittsburgh. 101. Cody Wallace, C, Texas A&M; drafted by St. Louis.

103. Martin Rucker, TE Missouri; drafted by Atlanta. 109. Jermichael Finley, TE,

Collins with the fifth pick of

— Tom Keegan

PREPS PLUS



LAWRENCE HIGH SENIOR SWIMMERS, from front to back, Melissa Naff, Samantha Page, Katie Jones, Kylea Bates, Hannah Buchner, Mallory West, Sabina Prziada and Paula Kyriakos all have accepted supporting roles to a talented group of underclassmen.

Seniors stay involved

By Matt Tait

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Heading into Thursday's final home meet of the season, the Lawrence High girls swimming and diving team has qualified for 15 spots at the state meet in May.

Of those 15, just one has ior. Considering the fact that there are 11 seniors on the squad, the number is surprisingly low. But when the overwhelming talent and dedication of the underclassmen is taken into account, the disparity doesn't cause so much as an ounce of animosity.

"Our younger girls are amazing, they really are," senior Katie Jones said. "You can't be upset about it. You just have to be happy for them and support them because they're part of the team."

It's that kind of attitude which Jones shares with 10 other seniors — that leaves Lions coach Kent McDonald with a sense of relief.

"A couple of the seniors were on the top relays and, as the season has gone on, they got pushed back a spot,' McDonald said. "That's been a big worry for me, but so far nobody has seemed to be too upset about it. In fact, what I have seen more is that the seniors who are getting beat by the younger girls are still trying hard and still pushing themselves to beat them. They haven't given up."

The lone senior to qualify for state thus far is diver Mal-

They all realize we're winning, or doing better, because of them."

- LHS swim coach Kent McDonald, on his seniors' positive attitudes

been delivered by an LHS sen- her interaction with the meets to educating them on swimmers is limited, West said she and the rest of the seniors have embraced their roles on this year's team.

We don't really teach the younger girls things," West said. "That's more for the coaches to do. We just try to lead by example with work ethic and we encourage them as much as we can."

The sunny side of McDonald's dilemma is that swimming is not like basketball, baseball or football. In those sports, if freshmen or sophomores are good enough to play varsity, they often do so at the expense of upperclass-

That's not the case with swimming, where McDonald has the luxury of inserting girls into multiple events without hurting the team. In fact, entering more girls increases the odds of scoring points in each event. That, McDonald said, has become a huge factor in how the seniors have handled the influx of talented underclassmen.

"They all realize we're winning, or doing better, because of them," McDonald said.

competitive sense, the seniors

own strides. Nearly all of them have improved their times throughout the season and a few are closing in on state-qualifying times.

During the moments when they're not contributing, the seniors find other ways to stay involved. From helping the younger girls adjust to varsity LHS traditions, the Lions' leaders have taken a sense of pride from what they've been able to add.

'There are a lot of traditions that they don't know about that are fun to introduce to them," senior Hannah Buchner said.

One such tradition is the spelling out of "Lawrence Lions" before each meet. Another is the animal cracker honor, in which senior co-captains Paula Kyriakos and Melissa Naff hand out three boxes of animal crackers to the top swimmers each week.

With so many members of this year's team also competing with the Aquahawks during the rest of the year, focusing on fundamentals and technique has not been a major emphasis. However, nearly all of the underclassmen said they had learned something from the seniors throughout the season.

"I think all of the seniors are great leaders," said freshman Rachel Buchner, younger sister of Hannah. "They're really nice to all of us and they haven't bullied us or anything While that may be true in a like that. They all come to practice every day and work lory West. But even though themselves are making their really hard, and they support

What Keegan



Aqib Talib tested positive for marijuana three times during his stay in the KU football program has resulted in split opinion on how much, if at all, that will damage Talib's standing in the draft.

Mel Kiper has Talib going to

New Orleans with the 10th pick of the first round. The Associated Press has Talib going 20th, to Tampa Bay, and nfldraftcountdown.com has Dallas taking him at No. 22 It's conceivable the Orange

Bowl MVP could slip all the way to the fifth pick of the second round, where the Kansas City Chiefs would be wise to snag the big-play, big-bodied cornerback. The Chiefs could reach

across the border again and select offensive tackle Anthony

the third round. Jared Allen's departure makes defensive end Chris Long the first-round target. Offensive line and the secondary remain two huge needs for the Chiefs. Talib and Collins would fill both holes nicely and be in line for early playing time under Herman Edwards, even though they both went 0-2 at Arrowhead Stadium for Kansas.

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High School Sports Notebook

Let there be light

Lights at Free State High's softball field finally have been erected, and it appears the Firebirds will be able to use them at least once this season. "They're vertical," FSHS

coach **Pam Pine** said. "They're supposed to turn on the juice sometime this week.' Bad weather and the neces-

sity to allow the concrete light standards to cure for weeks delayed the \$80,000 project. The Firebirds have just one

home date remaining — May 1 against Shawnee Mission South — but Pine is trying to reschedule an earlier home rainout with Olathe North.

The lights will enable the Firebirds' softball doubleheaders to begin at 4:15 p.m. instead of 3:30 p.m.

Fortunately it was fake

During the last weekend's River City Baseball Festival, Lawrence High baseball coach Brad Stoll tried instilling a

his players. Win three games in three days, and LHS would be state champs. It didn't happen. LHS lost Day One to rain and Day Three, 1-0, to Rockhurst.

state-tournament mindset into

'Today was a state-championship environment," Stoll said after the loss. "You've got to come out with some serious

intensity, and we didn't do it. We'll learn from it, and hopefully when we are in a championship environment, we'll come out hot and ready to play."