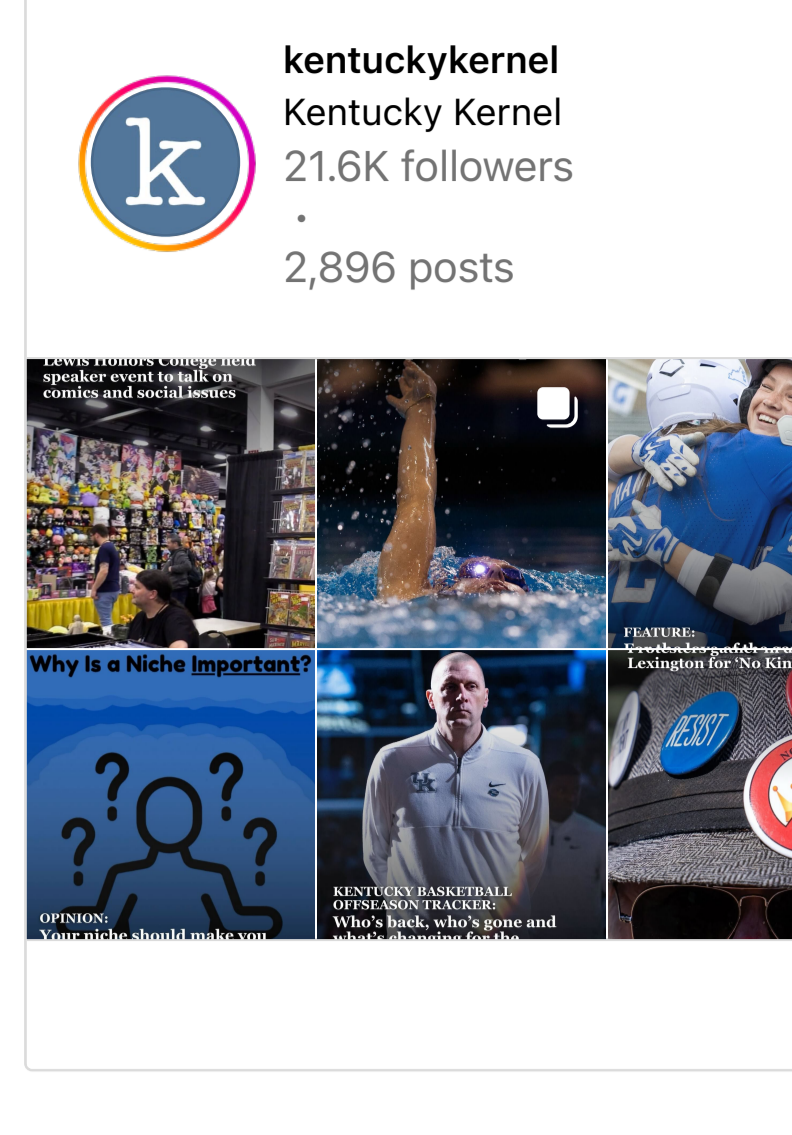


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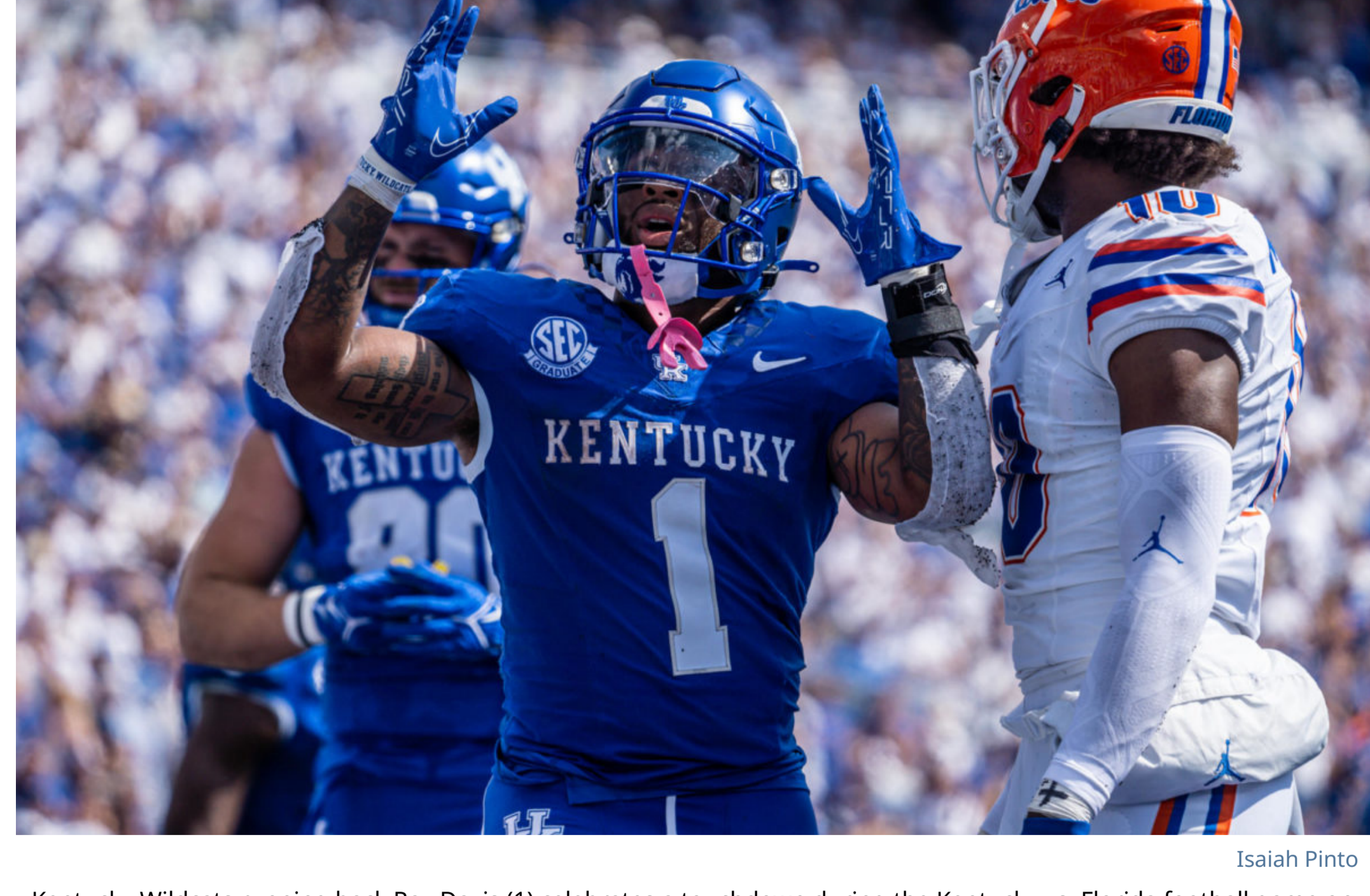
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NFL Draft preview: Ray Davis leaves lasting legacy in lone season with Cats

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Kentucky Wildcat running back Ray Davis (1) celebrates a touchdown during the Kentucky vs. Florida football game on Saturday, Sept. 30, 2023, at Kroger Field in Lexington, Kentucky. UK won 33-14. Photo by Isaiah Pinto | Staff

Coming out of Blair Academy in Blairstown, New Jersey, Ray Davis only received four offers to continue his football career at the collegiate level.

Kentucky football running back Ray Davis declares for 2024 NFL Draft	Kentucky football's Ray Davis becomes the first player since 2009 to record touchdowns in first seven matches at UK	Kentucky linebacker Trevin Wallace declares for 2024 NFL Draft	Kentucky defensive back Andru Phillips declares for 2024 NFL Draft

Five years later, Davis broke Kentucky's single-season touchdown record formerly set by Benny Snell Jr. in 2017, but the journey to Wildcat stardom wasn't without several challenges.

Growing up in San Francisco, both of his parents were in and out of prison. Davis and his siblings moved in with relatives and peers but, despite his difficult circumstances, he continued to play sports as a kid.

At eight-years-old Davis was placed in California's foster care system and, soon after, he lived in a shelter.

Davis was homeless.

He was then taken in by his grandmother and enrolled in Blair Academy in hopes of improving his academic standing, which eventually led him to college football.



Kentucky Wildcat running back Ray Davis (1) rushes during the Kentucky vs. Florida football game on Saturday, Sept. 30, 2023 at Kroger Field in Lexington, Kentucky. UK won 33-14. Photo by Isaiah Pinto | Staff (Isaiah Pinto)

In December 2018, Davis debuted his college career at Temple. In 16 games played, the San Francisco native ran for 1,244 yards and punched in 11 touchdowns.

After two seasons with the Owls, the running back entered the transfer portal, leaving the ACC to join an SEC squad in the Vanderbilt Commodores, which picked up Davis ahead of the 2021 season.

Unfortunately for Davis, his junior season with the Commodores was cut short after suffering a season-ending knee injury in week three against Wake Forest.

Despite that, it was Davis' senior season where he truly elevated his collegiate career.

The 2022 season was a bounce-back year for Davis, to say the least. The Vanderbilt back had five games with 100 yards rushing.

Arguably Davis' best game as a Commodore was a 129-yard rushing performance paired with a touchdown to upset No. 24 Kentucky in Kroger Field, snapping Vanderbilt's 26-game losing streak against SEC opponents.



Kentucky running back Ray Davis (1) runs with the ball during the Kentucky vs. Georgia football game on Saturday, Oct. 7, 2023, at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia. Kentucky lost 51-13. Photo by Samuel Colmar | Staff

Davis finished 2022 with 1,042 rushing yards and eight total touchdowns, being named a semifinalist for the Comeback Player of the Year Award.

Fresh off a strong bounce back senior season, Davis entered the transfer portal again and, this time, Kentucky picked up its former foe to become the face of the offense.

In addition to Davis the Cats added fellow transfer former NC

State quarterback Devin Leary and returned Liam Coen as offensive coordinator.

Davis became the heartbeat for an up-and-down Kentucky offense.

In Davis' debut in blue, Kentucky propelled past Ball State 44-14 due to 112 yards rushing and two touchdowns. Through the first three games, Davis scored five touchdowns: three through the air and two on the ground.

In week four, Davis faced off against his former squad, running for 78 yards and a pair of touchdowns en route to a 45-28 victory over Vanderbilt.

The scoring streak didn't end there for Davis. In fact, his best performance came in a 33-14 upset victory over No. 22 Florida, which improved the Cats' record to 5-0 at the time.

Davis ripped through the Gators' defense with 280 rushing yards and four touchdowns while averaging 10.8 yards per carry. That performance was the third most rushing yards for a Wildcat in a single game, only behind Lynn Bowden Jr. (2019) and Moe Williams (1995).

In Davis' last game as a Wildcat the running back helped push the Cats over in-state rival No. 10 Louisville with the go-ahead touchdown that ended in a 38-31 upset win.



Kentucky Wildcat running back Ray Davis (1) celebrates a touchdown during the Kentucky vs. Florida football game on Saturday, Sept. 30, 2023, at Kroger Field in Lexington, Kentucky. UK won 33-14. Photo by Isaiah Pinto | Staff (Isaiah Pinto)

He finished the game with 157 yards from scrimmage and three touchdowns, officially becoming the program's all-time leader in single season touchdowns.

Additionally, he became the only rusher to run for 1,000 yards with two different SEC programs.

Davis' efforts have gained national attention as he was named an All-American candidate. Moreover, Davis finished in the top-15 nationwide in rushing yards and scored the third-most touchdowns in the nation.

This past season, Davis earned an All-SEC honor alongside teammates Maxwell Hairston, Deone Walker and Barion Brown.

On November 27th, Davis officially declared for the 2024 NFL Draft, following in the footsteps of former Kentucky running backs Chris Rodriguez (2022) and Snell Jr. (2018).

The 2024 NFL Draft is set to begin on April 25 at 8 p.m. ET and will air live on ESPN. Davis, along with five other Wildcats, will hope to hear their names called to fulfill their dreams of entering the National Football League.

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