

HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL

Travelers elite youth team migrates to Ky.

LEAGUE BOASTS TOP PREP PROSPECTS

By Ben Roberts
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Starting this weekend, a new brand of basketball is coming to Kentucky.

The Nike-sponsored Elite Youth Basketball League (EYBL) has been the summer home to such prep stars as Anthony Davis, Michael Kidd-Gilchrist, Nerlens Noel, Andrew Wiggins and Julius Randle in recent years.

On Saturday, the Travelers Basketball club will hold its first practice in Lexington — the team's new headquarters — and officially become the first EYBL team to be based in Kentucky.

The Travelers are moving north after a quarter century in Tennessee, where Ron Mercer, Corey Brewer and Vincent Yarbrough were among its most notable players.

The team's director, Andy Rines, said the decision to relocate to Kentucky was made last fall.

"We had 25 great years in Tennessee. But for the past three or four years, the talent level in the east and middle part of the state has been on the decline," Rines said.

According to EYBL rules, a team must primarily consist of players from its state of operation. Each team is allowed to have three out-of-state players, but they must come from a bordering state.

As Tennessee's talent pool dwindled in recent years, Rines and other team officials started scouting Kentucky to fill out their roster.

"Once we got up here, we realized the talent in Kentucky right now is much better than what's in Tennessee," he said. "That gave us the idea to make the move."

The Travelers' leading scorer and rebounder last year was Lexington Catholic forward Jack Whitman, who will play his college ball at William & Mary.

This year, the Travelers will field an EYBL team and a 16-and-under team. Seventeen of the 21 total players on the rosters are from Kentucky.

The EYBL squad includes Holmes point guard James "Beetle" Bolden, who wowed a couple of Rupp Arena crowds with his performances during last week's Sweet Sixteen.

Lafayette forward Jackson Davis, Knott Central guard Camron Justice and Dixie Heights guard Brandon Hutton are also on the team, which will be coached by former Vanderbilt player Brendan Plavich.

The 16-and-under roster includes three Lexington high schoolers — Catholic's Tanner Johnson, LCA's Matt Rose and Lafayette's Shon Wright.

Holmes Coach Jason Boohar, who led Shelby Valley to a Sweet Sixteen title in 2010, hopes the arrival of the Travelers means good things for high school basketball in the state.

"I was excited to hear that they were coming to Kentucky," Boohar said. "I think

we're seeing Kentucky high school basketball back up on the rise. Hopefully their shift from Tennessee to Kentucky is another sign of that.

"They'll get a taste of what the best is all about, and they'll have some humbling experiences, I'm sure."

The competition will be stiff.

Class of 2014 prospects Tyus Jones, Emmanuel Mudiay, Jahlil Okafor, Stanley Johnson and Trey Lyles all have UK scholarship offers and all are expected to play on the EYBL circuit again this year.

"The competition is second to none," Rines said. "You've got 80, 85 percent of the best high school players in the country in the league. ... From the kids' standpoint, the competition is the best and the exposure is the best."

The Travelers — one of 40 EYBL teams from the United States and Canada — will play 20 regular-season games at stops in Los Angeles; Hampton, Va.; Minneapolis and Dallas.

The top 24 teams at the conclusion of the regular season are sent to the Nike Peach Jam finals in South Carolina, where just about every top college coach in the country will be waiting.

Last year's Peach Jam championship game featured a matchup between teams led by Wiggins and fellow UK recruit Aaron Gordon.

"The goal is to make the Peach Jam. If you do that, your year is the ultimate success," Rines said. "But the one thing that's different about the EYBL is there are no easy games. Even the worst teams are really good."

The team plans to hold two-a-day practices every Saturday until the end of the school year.

The first EYBL game of 2013 will be played April 19 in Los Angeles, and that will mark the start of a new chapter for the Travelers basketball program.

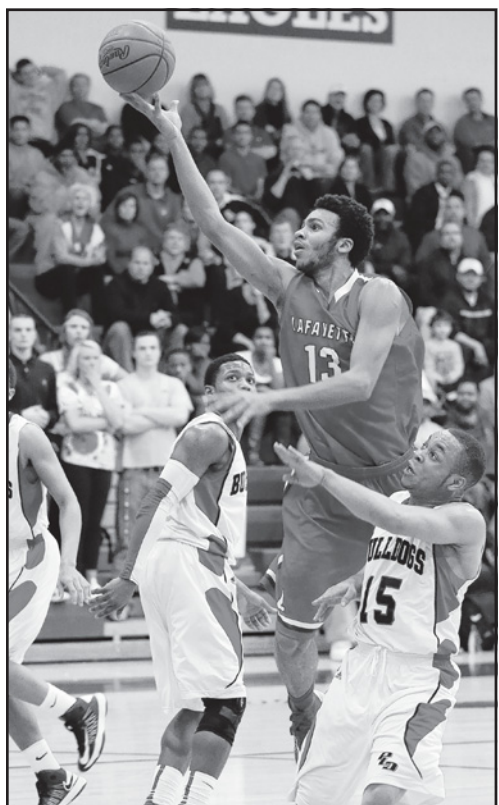
"We've played Tyus Jones since he was in ninth grade, and it never gets easy," Rines said. "But that's the fun of it too, just knowing that every game is so highly competitive. And these kids are competitors, so I think that's what they want."

TRAVELERS BASKETBALL CLUB

EYBL ROSTER table with columns: Player, Class, High school

16-AND-UNDER ROSTER table with columns: Player, Class, High school

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Lafayette's Jackson Davis scored over Dunbar's Mike Smith (15) in the 43rd District tournament in February. Davis is part of the new, Nike-sponsored Elite Youth Basketball League in Kentucky.

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BAFFERT HAS SUPER LEGACY AT OAKLAWN

Trainer's Super Ninety Nine, Den's Legacy are Rebel contenders



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Verrazano was a fearsome favorite in last weekend's Grade II Tampa Bay Derby because, despite questions about his inexperience, there was just no arguing how superior his form was compared to his opponents that day.

When the 11-hour field for the Grade II Rebel Stakes goes to post at Oaklawn Park on Saturday, Super Ninety Nine might be considered even more of an overwhelming choice than his 3-to-2 morning-line odds suggest.

He dusted some of the same challengers by 1 1/4 lengths in the Grade III Southwest Stakes at Oaklawn on Feb. 18 and the son of Pulpit is unbeaten going two turns.

But when evaluating the colt's potential outcome for this race, the key piece of information might be the man listed as his trainer.

The level of domination Hall of Famer Bob Baffert has had shipping horses from California to Oaklawn Park over the years is equal parts astonishing and terrifying, depending on which side of the cheering fence you fall on.

With 29 lifetime starters at the Hot Springs track, Baffert has saddled 17 winners and 13 graded stakes victors. He's won the last three Rebel Stakes with Lookin At Lucky (2010), The Factor (2011) and Secret Circle (2012).

Last season Baffert won six of the eight graded stakes he entered at Oaklawn, most notably the Grade I Arkansas Derby with eventual Kentucky Derby and Preakness Stakes runner-up Bodemeister.

Because Baffert doesn't send his prospects to Arkansas unless he thinks they are ready to do something special, Super Ninety Nine and his stablemate and fellow Rebel Stakes contender Den's Legacy are further elevated by that association. Though his frame and pedigree suggests more a miler, Super Ninety Nine handled the 1 1/16-mile Southwest Stakes like a horse who wanted more and has had two stellar workouts since.

Den's Legacy has been consistent in his 10 starts, finishing off the board twice and most recently running second in the Grade II Robert B. Lewis Stakes.

The D. Wayne Lukas-trained duo of Oxbow and Will Take Charge are among those trying to thwart Baffert, as will the Todd Pletcher-trained Delhomme, who is making his season debut.

Though Baffert isn't slated to make the trip to Arkansas, his challengers will be trying to beat him in what has essentially become his house.

The Derby Dozen

1. Itsmyluckyday: Seasoned son of Lawyer Ron worked one mile in 1:46 flat at Calder last Saturday in a move trainer Eddie Plesa Jr.

DERBY WATCH

Breeders' to pay travel costs

The Breeders' Cup will pay travel costs for all horses shipping from outside of California for the first time and will lower entry fees by 1 percent for the Nov. 1-2 event at Santa Anita in Arcadia, Calif.

The Breeders' Cup board of directors on Friday approved giving owners of horses shipping from outside of North America a \$40,000 travel allowance, while owners of domestic horses shipping to California will get a \$10,000 allowance.

Breeders' Cup chairman Tom Ludt says the decision will make the event more affordable and increase its global reach.

described as "perfect." Verrazano has been the most brilliant member of this class, but Itsmyluckyday has the experience edge with nine starts.

2. Verrazano: His 3-length victory in the Tampa Bay Derby last weekend drove home why this son of More Than Ready has generated such excitement. He bobbed at the start and didn't appear to relish the surface, yet still handled his competition with freakish ease.

3. Orb: Trainer Shug McGaughey said he "couldn't be more pleased" with the way Orb looked covering 4 furlongs in :48.40 at Payson Park on Monday, his first move since winning the Grade II Fountain of Youth.

4. Vyjack: Unbeaten gelding worked a half mile in :51.23 at Aqueduct on Friday in his first move since taking the Gotham Stakes. Downer news came this week as various outlets reported trainer Rudy Rodriguez would serve a 20-day suspension for two flunixin positives last year, though he will be the trainer of record when Vyjack starts in the Wood Memorial.

5. Revolutionary: His potential challengers for the Louisiana Derby shrank by one when Risen Star Stakes winner Ive Struck a Nerve sustained an ankle injury during a workout last Saturday morning that will knock him off the Triple Crown trail.

6. Shanghai Bobby: Reigning juvenile champion clicked off another 5-furlong move Sunday, covering the distance in 1:02.90. His expected presence in the Florida Derby, along with Orb and Itsmyluckyday, appears to be scaring some off as there doesn't seem to be many others pointing to that spot at the moment.

Saturday's Thoroughbred racing entries

Racing entries section containing multiple tables for Turfway, 5th-\$7,000, 9th-\$28,600, and other races, listing horses, jockeys, odds, and times.

Friday's Thoroughbred racing results

Racing results section containing multiple tables for Turfway, 6th-\$11,400, 6th-\$700, and other races, listing horses, jockeys, odds, and times.

stablemates but fact remains he has never not fired in a race.

7. Hear the Ghost: Yes, he benefited from the pace duel that developed between Flashback and Goldcents in winning the Grade II San Felipe last weekend but it's hard not to like a horse who swallows up ground the way the gelding son of Ghostzapper did in the final sixteenth.

8. Flashback: The speed duel that set things up for Hear the Ghost cost jockey Julien Lejaroux the mount on Flashback as agent Tony Matos confirmed Thursday that Garrett Gomez will ride the son of Tapit in the Santa Anita Derby.

9. Normandy Invasion: Like Flashback, he will also have a new rider for his final Derby prep as owner Rick Porter announced this week that Javier Castellano would ride Normandy Invasion in the Wood Memorial, taking over for Jose Lezcano after the pair's fifth-place finish in the Risen Star.

10. Oxbow: Hall of Fame trainer D. Wayne Lukas describes him as one of the toughest horses he's ever conditioned, saying there is no quit in the son of Awesome Again.

11. Super Ninety Nine: Baffert says this colt is built like a sprinter, yet he has turned a corner going two turns, including his freaky 1 1/4-length win over a sealed, sloppy track in the Southwest Stakes.

12. Ruydilluc: Worked 5 furlongs in 1:02.02 on the turf at Palm Meadows on Thursday in preparation for his expected start in the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes at Keeneland on April 13.

The next dozen

Shakin It Up, Uncaptured, Goldcents, Treasury Bill, Palace Malice, Delhomme, West Hills Giant, Tiz a Minister, Den's Legacy, Java's War, Code West, Departing.

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SANTA ANITA

7th-\$300,000, Santa Margarita Stakes (Grade I), fillies & mares 4-years-old and up, 1 1/8 miles, 6:35

1 The Only Key K. Krigger 118 30-1
2 Brushed by a Star V. Espinoza 120 7-2

10th-\$600,000, Rebel Stakes (Grade II), 3-year-olds, 1 1/8 miles, 6:48

2 Carve C. Nakatani 117 15-1
1 a Texas-1 Tribute Bill J. Talamo 115 5-1

11th-\$150,000, San Luis Rey Stakes (Grade II), 4-year-olds and up, 1 1/2 miles (turf), 7:07

1 Slim Shadley G. Stevens 123 3-1
2 Interaction B. Blanc 118 2-1

9th-\$150,000, Azeri Stakes (Grade III), fillies & mares 4-years-old and up, 1 1/8 miles, 6:13

1 Tiz Mue Z J. Rocco, Jr. 117 5-1
2 Holy Heavens I. Ocampo 113 30-1

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