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TOP STORY

WKU MEN'S BASKETBALL

## Stansbury confident Hilltoppers are reaching roster continuity

Coach also comments on Queen's departure, Auriantal's hire

BRAD STEPHENS [bstephens@bgdailynews.com](mailto:bstephens@bgdailynews.com) 9 hrs ago



Rick Stansbury scrambled to put together his first three Western Kentucky rosters.

The coach brought in nine newcomers for the 2016-17 Hilltopper squad, his first at WKU.

Eight newcomers joined the Toppers for the 2017-18 season. That number doesn't include two players – Jordan Brangers and Mitchell Robinson – who enrolled but left school before the season began.

Now eight new faces are listed on WKU's preseason roster for the 2018-19 campaign. Trevelin Queen, who parted ways with the program last month, doesn't count toward that number.

Newcomers Dalano Banton, Charles Bassey, Jeremiah Gambrell, Matt Horton, Desean Murray and Tolu Smith are all eligible to play this season. Transfers Patrick Murphy, a walk-on, and Carson Williams joined the program but must sit out the season.

The good news for Stansbury is he's confident he won't have to overhaul the Hilltopper roster again next offseason.

"Here's the good thing going into this season, probably for the first time," Stansbury said Friday. "We feel like we have a little continuity in your program.

"That's what you've got to have in recruiting to get your program where you want to get it. You can't be out scrambling trying to sign eight or nine guys every year."

Of the 15 players listed on WKU's preseason roster, the redshirt senior Bearden and fifth-year player Murray are the only two projected to finish their college careers this season.

Horton, Moustapha Diagne and Jared Savage all have two years of eligibility left, starting this season. Murphy and Williams will have two years left apiece starting in 2019-20.

Josh Anderson, Taveion Hollingsworth, Marek Nelson and Jake Ohmer are all sophomores with three years to play. Freshmen Banton, Basse, Gambrell and Smith have four years to play, starting this season.

The spread of players across classes means that, barring unforeseen roster attrition, Stansbury won't have to bring in eight or nine players this offseason like he has the last three years.

WKU's third-year coach said he'll likely sign "three or four" players to the Tops' 2019 class.

"That's a lot easier going into," Stansbury said. "... We've been recruiting some guys. We're trying to get some guys, ones that we're not supposed to have. Those are the ones we want.

"Will we sign any in November? I don't know. Will we sign two or three in November? But for the year, we've got three or four that we can sign, and that's good compared to where it's been."

Jackson Harlan is the only 2019 prospect who's announced a commitment to WKU. Harlan, a 6-foot-5 guard from Albany (Clinton County High School), accepted a scholarship offer from the Hilltoppers in June after starring at a team camp.

WKU also hosted Class of 2020 prospect Dayvion McKnight for a visit last month. He's a guard from Collins HS in Shelbyville.

Even if the Hilltoppers don't need eight- or nine-man classes in years to come, Stansbury promised to stay aggressive in chasing top prospects.

"There's one NCAA Tournament," Stansbury said. "We all play for the same thing. They don't have different levels of it. If there were different levels of it, we'd recruit differently.

“But until they change that, we’ve all got to have the same type of players.”

## **Stansbury: Queen’s departure was due to ‘his actions’**

Friday marked Stansbury’s first meeting with the local media since his program and Queen parted ways. The junior college transfer announced Sept. 14 on Twitter that he’d no longer attend WKU.

Stansbury said Queen “made the decision with his actions not to be part of the team.”

“I didn’t make the decision,” Stansbury said. “He made the decision. When you don’t do right, you get held accountable for the decisions you make.”

Stansbury didn’t elaborate on Queen’s specific actions that led to his departure.

Queen, a 6-foot-5, 185-pound guard, transferred this summer to WKU after playing last season at New Mexico Military Institute.

As a sophomore at NMMI, Queen averaged 26 points, 7.3 rebounds, 2.8 steals and 2.2 assists per game. He ranked fourth nationally across all junior college play in scoring and scored at least 30 points seven times during the season.

Queen was ranked as the No. 8 junior college prospect in the country by JUCO Recruiting.



The transfer's departure left Anderson, Banton, Bearden, Gambrell, Hollingsworth and Ohmer as the guards listed on the Hilltoppers' active roster.

Gambrell will miss a significant portion of the season though after recently undergoing surgery for a lower-leg stress fracture.

### **Stansbury: Hiring Auriantal was 'easy decision'**

Friday also marked Stansbury's first meeting with the local media since the July hire of assistant coach Hennssy Auriantal.

Stansbury called Auriantal and his family "high-quality people" and said the hire was "an easy decision."

"I want the same kind of people (as coaches) that you want as players," Stansbury said. "I want good people first and then if they can bring something to your program after that, then you've got the best of both worlds, and he can do that."

Auriantal joined Marc Hsu and Nikita Johnson in July as the third full-time assistant on Stansbury's staff. He'll make \$200,000 per year in his role.

The native Canadian is legal guardian to two current Hilltoppers, Basseyy and Diagne. Basseyy moved to the United States in high school from his native Nigeria, while Diagne arrived during his prep days from Senegal.

Auriantal is also uncle to former WKU guard Junior Lomomba.

The assistant's Division I experience includes four seasons playing at Wisconsin (1995-99) and two seasons on Jackson State's staff (2013-15).

Auriantal was a guard for the Badgers, competing twice in the NCAA Tournament and once in the National Invitation Tournament. He graduated with a degree in kinesiology and was named to the Big Ten All-Academic Team in 1997 and 1999.

“He’s tied to a lot of different people in a lot of different areas of recruiting,” Stansbury said of Auriantal. “There’s no question, there’s a reason why Charles has been so close to him through the years. There’s a reason why, when you’re the kind of person that he and his wife (Nathalie) are. ...

“Charles is not the only young man that he’s associated with and has known through the years. He has a lot of ties from where he’s been, the different areas he’s been. It’s a different kind of tie. It’s a good tie.”

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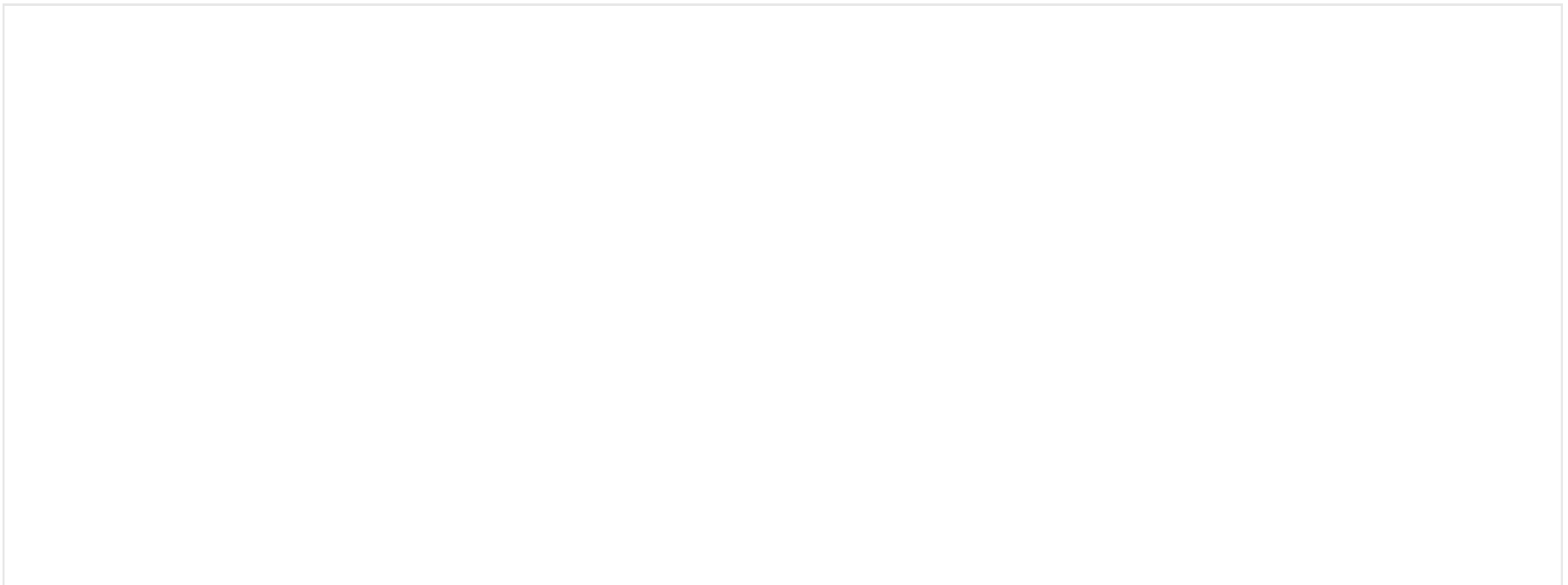


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**Brad Stephens**

Bowling Green Daily News sports reporter primarily covering Western Kentucky football and men's basketball.

