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Hilltoppers' 3-point streak impressive

7 hrs ago

To some degree, Western Kentucky's consistent ability to make the 3-point shot has flown under the radar for the past three-plus decades, and the time has come to shed light on what the Hilltoppers have achieved during college basketball's shot-clock era, which began in the 1986-87 season.

On Thursday night, WKU will be attempting to become just the fifth program in NCAA Division I history to make a 3-point basket in 1,000 consecutive games when it visits Rice for a Conference USA matchup.

As it stands, the Hilltoppers (999) trail only UNLV (1,060 games), Vanderbilt (1,052 games) and Duke (1,042 games) in terms of the current active streak in the NCAA. Arkansas, which has made a 3 in 998 consecutive games, is right on Western's heels.

Kentucky was the first program to reach the 1,000 mark on Feb. 11, 2017, but the Wildcats' streak eventually ended at 1,047 games and has since been passed by both the Runnin' Rebels and Commodores. UK went 0-for-6 from 3-point range on March 15, 2018 in a 78-73 win over Davidson in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

The Hilltoppers' streak, meanwhile, began almost reluctantly on March 15, 1987, in a 104-86 second-round NCAA Tournament loss to Syracuse (at Syracuse, N.Y.), after Western failed to make a 3-pointer in a 64-62 first-round victory over West Virginia that ended on Kannard Johnson's layup at the buzzer.

Kurk Lee made three 3s against the Orange to ignite the streak, which might well have started earlier were it not for the fact that first-year WKU coach Murray Arnold, an old-school, by-the-book tactician, was slow to embrace -- and adequately defend, some might add -- the 3-pointer in its collegiate infancy.

Nonetheless, Lee's 3s started a streak that, quite remarkably, has survived the coaching reigns of Arnold (1986-91), Ralph Willard (1991-94), Matt Kilcullen (1995-98), co-coaches Ron Brown and Al Seibert (after Kilcullen was fired with six games left in the 1997-98 season), Dennis Felton (1998-2004), Darrin Horn (2004-08), Ken McDonald (2008-2012), Ray Harper (2012-16), and Rick Stansbury (2017-present).

Close calls? Naturally, there have been a few.



During Western's streak, there have been 19 games in which the Hilltoppers made only one 3-pointer. Two of those games came last season, with both going to the second half before the Tops connected from beyond the arc. The most close calls came in 1987-88 and 1992-93 (an NCAA Tournament Sweet 16 team), when the Hilltoppers hit only one 3-pointer in four games both seasons.

The closest call of all, however, came on Jan. 6, 2011, when WKU waited until the final minute to connect from distance. With only 51 seconds remaining in a 62-59 Hilltopper loss, Kahlil McDonald sank the team's only 3-pointer of the game.

There is, of course, no doubt about the most significant 3-pointer in program history.

In the first round of the 2008 NCAA Tournament, the Hilltoppers went to overtime against Drake. With WKU trailing by one, Ty Rogers received a clever, no-look pass from a streaking Tyrone Brazelton and drained a 26-footer at the horn to provide Western a dramatic 101-99 victory. Rogers' shot is one of the most iconic in NCAA Tournament history, and won the ESPY Award that year for Best Finish.

Now, the Hilltoppers are shooting to make from distance for the 1,000th consecutive game -- and that's significant.

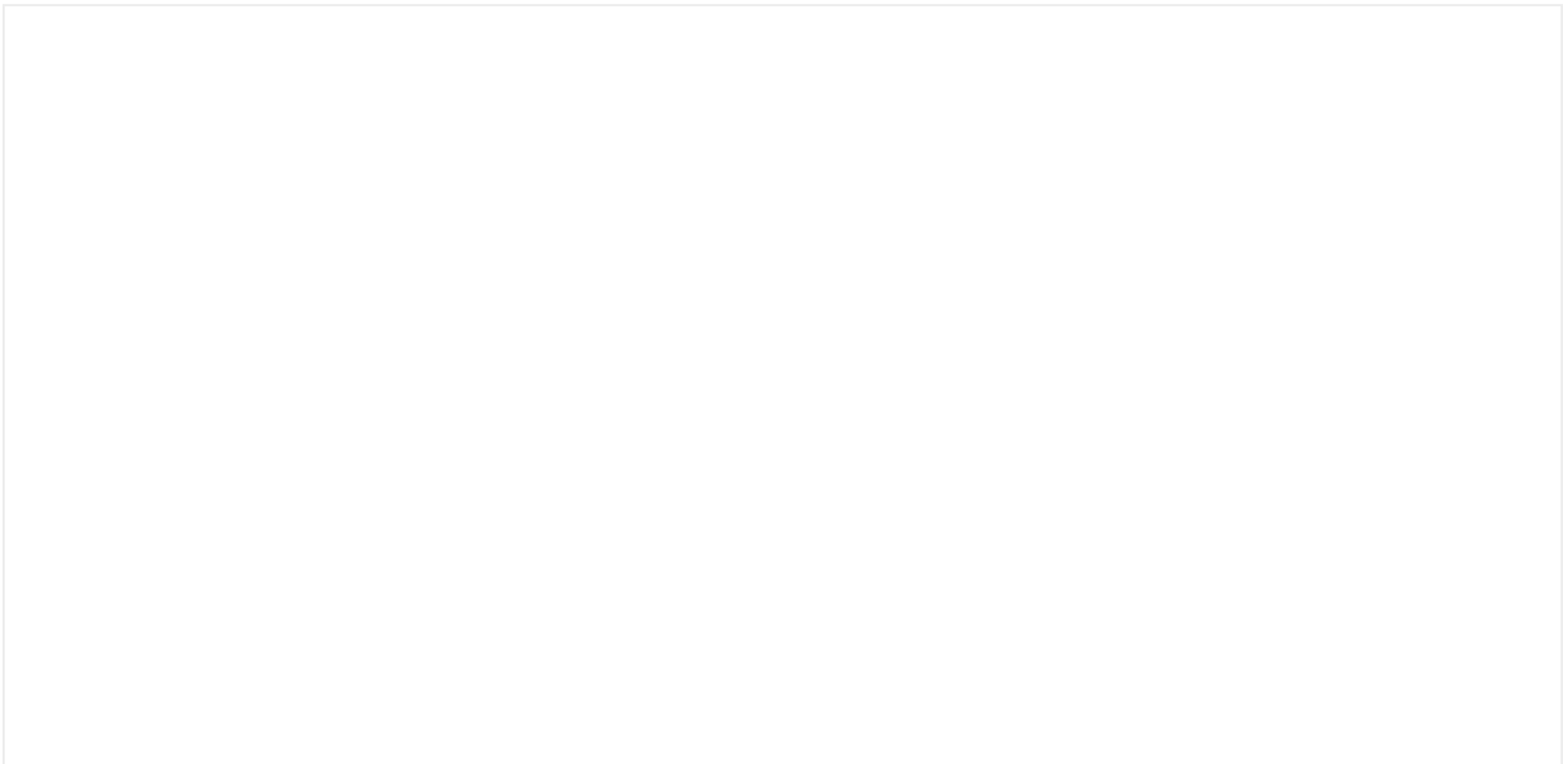


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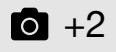


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