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WKU FOOTBALL

Mason, Sanford to reunite Saturday in Nashville

Shurmur, White friends from Manning camp; Nashville-area Hilltoppers heading home

BRAD STEPHENS bstephens@bgdailynews.com 2 hrs ago



Vanderbilt head coach Derek Mason walks off the field following their loss to Mississippi, 57-35 at an NCAA college football game in Oxford, Miss., Saturday, Oct. 14, 2017.

Rogelio V. Solis/AP

NASHVILLE – Two old friends will renew acquaintances Saturday at Vanderbilt Stadium.

Vanderbilt coach Derek Mason and Western Kentucky counterpart Mike Sanford worked together from 2011-13 as assistant football coaches at Stanford. Their current teams will face each other at 11 a.m. Saturday in a game broadcast by ESPNU.

“Mike’s a good friend,” Mason said Tuesday during a news conference at Vanderbilt Stadium. “We share a lot of the same values about family. We share a lot of the same values about football.

“Mike’s a great coach. He comes from a coaching family. He’s been around coaching his whole life. He’s a terrific ball coach and I have a lot of respect for him.”

Mason and Sanford worked in close quarters during their time together with the Cardinal. The coaches were next-door neighbors in an area Mason called the “Card Yard.”

“We lived probably 25 feet from each other,” Sanford said Monday. “... We hit it off instantly.”

Mason said his daughters, both teenagers during that time, used to play and dance outside with Sanford’s daughter Peyton, then a toddler.

“When it’s all said and done, you become close in the Card Yard,” Mason said.

Mason, Sanford and another Stanford assistant, Chester McGlockton, went through a coaches’ Bible study together. Sanford said he and Mason were on the road recruiting in late November 2011 when they learned of McGlockton’s sudden death due to a heart complication.

“That really brought coach Mason and I together through an adverse time in our program at Stanford,” Sanford said.

Mason and Stanford enjoyed great successes during their time together with the Cardinal. The program went to three straight bowls then part of the BCS system, including two Rose Bowls, and won Pacific 12 Conference titles in 2012 and ’13.

Sanford coached running backs, quarterbacks and wide receivers at different points in his Stanford tenure from 2011-13, and also served his final two seasons there as recruiting coordinator. Mason was defensive coordinator then under coach David Shaw.

Both coaches left Stanford after the 2013 season. Mason took the head coaching job at Vanderbilt, where he's gone 16-29 in four seasons.

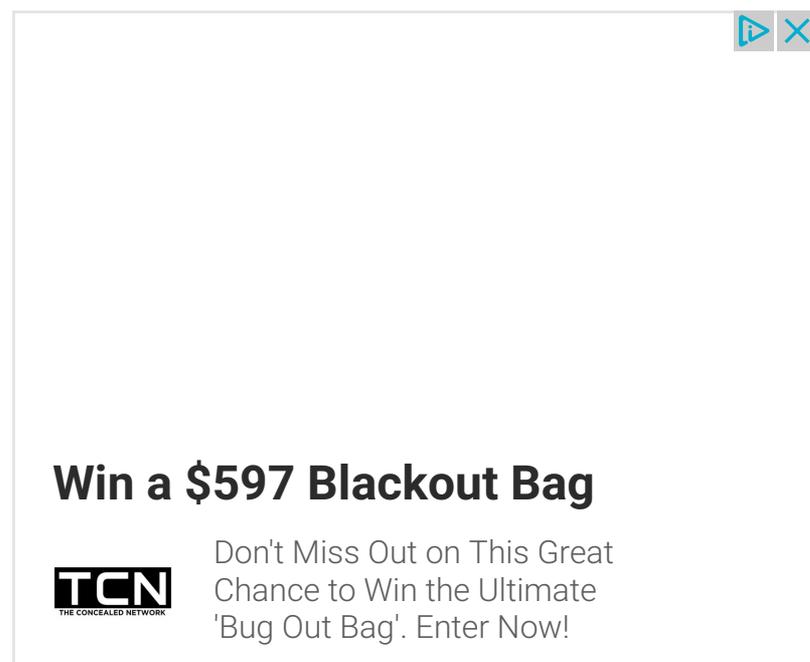
Sanford spent one year as offensive coordinator at Boise State and then two at Notre Dame before taking the WKU job in December. His Hilltoppers are 5-3 this season.

"I think at this level you've got to be able to speak to the hearts of young men before you get to the ball," Mason said. "Mike's one of those coaches. He can speak to young men and young men believe exactly what he says."

Shurmur, White to reunite Saturday

The two quarterbacks facing each other Saturday also have familiarity with one another. Vanderbilt's Kyle Shurmur and WKU's Mike White attended the Manning Passing Academy this summer as counselors and became friends during their time together.

"He's a good guy, great quarterback as you see," Shurmur said. "He's a great person and I'm not surprised he's having success (at WKU). ..."



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“I expect him to be a great leader with the way he handles himself. I enjoyed spending time with him at the Manning camp.”

White has completed 65.4 percent of his passes this season for 291 yards per game, with 14 touchdowns against six interceptions. He’s also run for a team-best five TDs.

Shurmur is the son of longtime NFL coach Pat Shurmur. He’s completed 54.9 percent of his passes this year for 208 yards per game, with 18 touchdowns against three interceptions for the Commodores (3-5).

“He’s a great kid,” White said of Shurmur. “We hung out a lot (at the Manning camp). We obviously worked out down there but the down-time, we hung out and talked. ... I got to meet his dad too, good people.

“I’m looking forward to meeting up with him and going at it. Whenever you can play against a good quarterback it’s always fun, especially someone you know.”

Several Hilltoppers headed back home

Seven WKU players listed on the school’s preseason roster hail from Tennessee, with most of those coming from the Nashville area. They’ll make a homecoming for Saturday’s game.

Defensive tackle Jeremy Darvin, offensive lineman Parker Howell and wide receiver Dalton Ponchillia are all from Nashville. Running back D'Andre Ferby's hometown is Smyrna, while wide receiver Quin Jernighan is a LaVergne native.

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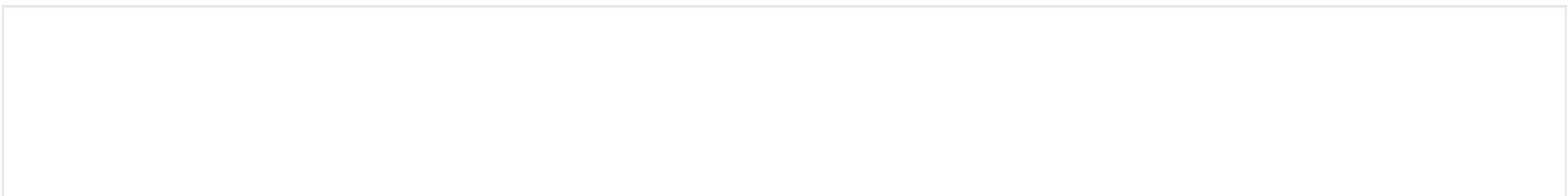
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Brad Stephens

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