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Ex-University High star Springwater making impression at Columbia

By Matthew Snyder



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Noah Springwater's character and work ethic earned him a recent promotion to team captain at Columbia.

This season's Kentucky men's basketball team will likely go down as one of the greatest in collegiate history. Through the Wildcats' first nine games, all wins, they trailed just 36 minutes. But in their 10th, a Dec. 10 home encounter against Columbia, it took 26 minutes for Kentucky to grab a lead.

Though the No. 1 Wildcats ended up with a 56-46 win, it was the Lions, touted as a contender for this season's Ivy League title, who earned the brunt of the plaudits for their performance in fabled Rupp Arena.

But things have not gone smoothly since.

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"In an odd way, it's created a false sense for us," Columbia coach Kyle Smith said. "We were patted on the back for doing that, and instead it put a target on our back. And that's a lot different than playing as the underdog."

The Lions dropped two games, including a sluggish showing at Connecticut and a tough loss to St. Francis of Brooklyn, N.Y. So on New Year's Eve, Smith decided to shake things up.

He informed his team that a third captain would be nominated for the remainder of the season: Noah Springwater, a 6-foot-3, 180-pound senior guard.

"He's been a captain for us, but we wanted to publicly do it," Smith said. "Noah has unbelievable character and work ethic. He's a selfless human being."

That's been the case for Springwater since he starred for University High School. In 2007, Springwater became the first freshman to play for the varsity under coach Randy Bessolo. In Springwater's four seasons, the Red Devils won 101 games.

After nine years as an assistant coach at St. Mary's, Smith took the Columbia position ahead of the 2010-11 season. Springwater was mulling several Division III options, but when Smith extended an invitation to the Columbia Elite Camp, Springwater attended and loved it. That fall, Springwater became one of Smith's first recruits.

The decision resonated with Bessolo, who is a Columbia alum.

"It's a fun way to honor Randy, for all the effort he put in supporting me," said Springwater, who began playing club basketball for Bessolo in seventh grade. "He encouraged me to play AAU, and that got me a shot to go to colleges."

When Bessolo visits Manhattan, N.Y., now, he takes Springwater to some of his favorite spots around campus.

"It's fun to hear the old stories, but I think it's changed a little since he was here," Springwater said, laughing.

"It's fun to follow him," said Bessolo. "He's had some injuries, but he played in every game as a junior, and he won the awards for best hustle and best student on the team. He's a great young man."

As a freshman at Columbia, Springwater was injured during the first conditioning practice. The result: several slipped disks in his lower back. He played through it, and averaged 13.3 minutes in 25 games, but by the end of the season, he had developed serious sciatica — pain shooting down his legs. Inflammatories got him through practice, but once the season ended, he shut everything down.

Though his playing time has dipped over the next two seasons, Springwater would rather speak of the infusion of talent that has bolstered the Lions, who won 21 games in 2013-14, earning the program's first postseason appearance since 1968, albeit the [CollegeInsider.com](#) tournament. The Lions are 7-5 this season.

"I knew my role had to change," Springwater said. "I wasn't going to be a big stud, I'd be a role player, energy guy, always bringing something to the table. So I did the things I could control, contributing to the team in practices and games. You make the most of it."

The reasoning behind Smith's official bestowal of captaincy this season? It's as much about the verve Springwater packs into 8.3 minutes per game as it is about the way he'll stay behind after practice with talented freshman guard Kyle Castlin to hoist additional jumpers.

Asked to describe Springwater's impact, Smith uses one word: immeasurable. "In my 22 years of coaching, I've never been around a guy that can get himself ready to compete and give incredibly consistent effort like him," Smith said. "He might sit 30 minutes, but he'll give you three minutes of his best effort. He's a flat-out warrior."

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