

Minutes of the University Athletics Committee  
University of Kentucky  
Thursday, June 12, 2025

The University Athletics Committee of the University of Kentucky Board of Trustees met on Thursday, June 12, 2025, in the Gatton Student Center, Harris Ballroom.

I. Meeting Opened

Trustee David Melanson, chair of the University Athletics Committee, called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. Chair Melanson asked Katie Hardwick to call the roll.

II. Roll Call

The following members of the University Athletics Committee were present: Board Members Skip Berry, Todd Case, Lance Lucas, David Melanson and Frank Shoop; Community Advisory Members Wells Bullard and Wilbur Hackett; and Faculty Athletics Representative Joe Fink.

III. Approval of Minutes

Chair Melanson asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the April 24, 2025, meeting. Trustee Case moved approval of the minutes, and Trustee Lucas seconded the motion. The motion carried without dissent.

Chair Melanson introduced Athletics Director Barnhart for remarks.

IV. Athletics Director's Report

Athletics Director Barnhart reported that in April the University's STUNT team competed at the national championships, finishing second. He congratulated Coach Blair Bergmann and the athletes, noting six earned All-America honors. He stated that STUNT is on track to become an official NCAA championship sport as early as 2027 due to the growth of sponsorship across schools. He commended Sandy Bell for her leadership and national promotion of the sport.

Athletics Director Barnhart reported that the men's tennis team reached the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Tournament for the ninth consecutive time, defeating Old Dominion before falling to Wake Forest, the eventual national champion. Jack Loutit and Eli Stephenson earned All-America honors in doubles. He noted that the softball team made its 16th straight NCAA Tournament appearance, one of only 12 schools nationally to do so, finishing second in the regional. He stated that the baseball team set a school record with its third consecutive NCAA Tournament bid and also placed second in its regional.

Athletics Director Barnhart reported that the men's and women's track and field teams are currently competing at the NCAA Championships in Eugene, Oregon, with 22 Wildcats qualifying. He stated that 116 student-athletes graduated in May, including 14 master's degrees and one doctorate. Combined with December's graduates, the total was 149 for the academic year. He noted that seven graduates came through the Cawood Ledford Scholarship Program, which helps former athletes return to complete their degrees. Since 1991, 185 student-athletes have graduated through the program, with more than three-quarters of a million dollars invested in the last five years.

AD Barnhart reported that student-athletes compiled a 3.435 Grade Point Average (GPA) for the spring, marking the 26th consecutive semester above 3.0. A total of 471 Wildcats earned a 3.0 or higher, including 155 with a perfect 4.0. He stated that the NCAA Academic Progress Rates confirmed all University teams exceeded required scores, with 16 surpassing the national public university average and seven earning perfect multi-year scores.

AD Barnhart congratulated Zoe Hammond, Southeastern Conference (SEC) Scholar-Athlete of the Year for women's tennis, and Academic All-America honoree. He also congratulated Dr. Rick Honaker, recipient of an SEC Faculty Achievement Award.

AD Barnhart reported that summer school has begun with many athletes on campus for training and "My New Kentucky Home," the orientation program designed to integrate new students into the University and Lexington community.

AD Barnhart stated that six athletes were named to SEC Community Service Teams, including Jackson Watts and Phoebe McCowan (track and field), Oakley Gee and Cathryn Brown (golf), Evan Byers (baseball) and Ella Emmert (softball). He noted that the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee has selected Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Bluegrass as the Community Partner of Choice for the upcoming year.

AD Barnhart reported on the CATSPY Awards, where 35 individuals and 15 teams were recognized. Isabella Magnelli, Brooklyn DeLeye and Emma Grome were named Miss Wildcat while Eli Cox, Lamont Butler and Devin Burkes were named Mr. Wildcat. He noted President Capilouto received the "Heart of a Wildcat" award.

He stated that the University held the Grand Re-Opening of Memorial Coliseum in April, with events celebrating its 75-year legacy and future role and reported that Maxwell Hairston and Deone Walker were drafted by the Buffalo Bills in the National Football League (NFL) Draft.

He noted that swimmers Carson Hick and Levi Sandidge finished in the top eight of the 1500-meter freestyle at the Toyota National Championships. In diving, Avery Giese will represent the United States at the World University Games and Zalika Methula will compete for South Africa at the World Aquatic Championships.

AD Barnhart reported that the University hosted Kentucky High School Athletic Association (KHSAA) state championships in track and field, tennis, softball and baseball, concluding a year with 13 NCAA, SEC and KHSAA events. He emphasized that UK Athletics hosted more than 400 events in total, generating millions for the Lexington economy. He recognized the dedication of support staff who make these events possible for the University and community.

AD Barnhart stated that final approval of the House settlement has been received. He explained that the Power Five schools will pay an estimated \$2.7 billion to student-athletes for pre-Name Image Likeness (NIL) years, and beginning in 2025-26 schools may spend \$20.5 million annually in new benefits for athletes. He noted that while the settlement creates financial challenges, preparations have been underway for more than a year to manage expenses and increase revenues. He reaffirmed the University's goal of placing diplomas in the hands and championship rings on the fingers of student-athletes.

AD Barnhart concluded his report by expressing sympathy for those affected by the recent tornadoes in Kentucky. He praised the efforts of student-athletes Jager Burton and Trent Noah for organizing relief campaigns that gathered two truckloads of supplies with the support of staff and the Big Blue Nation.

In closing, AD Barnhart recognized Assistant Athletics Director for Athletics Communications and Public Relations Tony Neely who was elected to the College Sports Communicators Hall of Fame and winner of the Arch Ward Award for excellence in sports communication. Tony has served forty-seven years in the enterprise of college athletics, and a great majority of that in the Southeastern Conference, and at the University of Kentucky. "We are blessed by Tony's humility and how hard he works for the University of Kentucky", said Barnhart. Mr. Neely was celebrated with a round of applause.

## V. Business Items

Chair Melanson introduced President Capilouto, who thanked Trustee Melanson for his strong leadership of the University Athletics Committee and his nine years on the Board of Trustees. He recognized his commitment to the institution and his invaluable service.

President Capilouto reported that the meeting and the proposals before the Board could not be more timely or consequential. He noted that just last Friday the final terms of the House settlement were approved, signaling the beginning of a new era in intercollegiate athletics. He stated that it is now the responsibility of the University, along with programs across the country, to write new chapters in the story of collegiate sports. He emphasized that Kentucky's story, as a university, is one committed to advancing the Commonwealth.

President Capilouto explained that athletics is essential to that story. He stated that athletics is a national brand which signals excellence and binds people to the University — the University of, for and with Kentucky.

He reported that the Board would hear a bold and innovative plan tailored to the University's needs and values. He reminded Trustees that the University's athletics program strives to put championship rings on fingers and diplomas in hands. He stated that the proposal includes a new strategic governance structure and operating model, unlike any in the country, to incentivize innovation and ensure long-term success. He praised the leadership of Athletics Director Mitch Barnhart, noting that under his leadership the University has developed one of the most successful programs in the nation over the past 25 years. However, he emphasized the need to think differently, grow strategically and generate resources to sustain success, which is measured not only in banners and trophies but also in preparing young people for lives of meaning and purpose.

He reported that while the current era brings changes and challenges specific to athletics, the principles guiding the University remain constant: investing in what matters. He stated that although the exact outcomes of such investments are not always clear, the University's commitment to its mission has consistently led to success.

President Capilouto recalled that more than a decade ago the University strategically invested in student housing, building 14 new residence halls in five years. He stated that those investments resulted in educating and graduating more students than ever before. He also highlighted the construction of a billion-dollar hospital bed tower nearly 15 years ago to extend healing and hope to more people. He reported that, as demand grew, the University began planning another hospital tower to continue meeting the advanced health care needs of the Commonwealth.

He emphasized that these were strategic investments in the future — in students, in people and in the state. He stated that the proposals before the Board represent another such investment. He described UK Athletics as a calling card, a connector and a catalyst, essential to advancing the University's broader mission of serving Kentucky today and into the future.

He acknowledged that challenges remain but affirmed that if the University continues to invest in what matters, it will remain successful. He concluded by stating that UK Athletics is among the most powerful programs in college sports, and it is time to channel that spirit into a new era. He expressed excitement about engaging with the Board on these proposals and leading Kentucky Athletics forward like champions.

President Capilouto turned the agenda over to AD Barnhart.

Athletics Director Barnhart reported that the University of Kentucky athletic department has operated on the same five principles for the last 23 years. He emphasized that while methods may change, principles remain constant. He stated that the

department's guiding principles include character of the heart and ensuring the right people are in the program, integrity of the brain in adhering to guidelines and rules, maintaining knowledge to remain at the forefront of sports and education, stewardship of resources entrusted to the department, and a competitive spirit that drives success both within the Southeastern Conference and nationally. He noted that these principles will continue to guide the program into the future.

He stated that the Champions Blue initiative establishes a structure that allows the University to adapt to a rapidly changing athletic landscape. He explained that college athletics is undergoing significant disruption rather than minor change, and flexibility is critical for future success.

Athletics Director Barnhart reported that Champions Blue will enable the University to unlock new revenue streams at a time when traditional sources, such as television contracts and conference revenue sharing, have slowed. He highlighted opportunities in joint venture agreements and public-private partnerships, which will strengthen the program and provide protection against the unknowns in college athletics.

He stated that the initiative also creates an ability for policy differentiation within the University through models such as LLCs under Beyond Blue. He noted that these structures provide access to outside experts and partners across the country, allowing the University to think differently and approach disruption with innovative solutions.

Athletics Director Barnhart concluded by reiterating the importance of maintaining principles, adapting methods, and embracing a competitive spirit in order for the University of Kentucky athletics program to thrive and excel in the years ahead.

AD Barnhart introduced Vice President and Chief Strategy and Growth Officer Rob Edwards for a presentation on Champions Blue.

Vice President Edwards stated that three topics would be discussed: the Champions Blue LLC Board and its structure, the upcoming 2026 Fiscal Year budget and financial plan, and the pathway forward for transitioning into Champions Blue.

Dr. Edwards reported that Champions Blue LLC is a wholly owned subsidiary of the University of Kentucky, organized as a not-for-profit and public entity. He stated that the UK Board of Trustees will continue its oversight role, including authorization of expenditures over one million dollars and review of financial reports from UK Athletics.

Dr. Edwards reported that the Champions Blue Board will support the athletics director and his leadership team. Dr. Edwards stated that the Board will include both University leaders and external advisors from the sports and industry sectors, with responsibilities in strategic support, revenue growth and financial planning.

Dr. Edwards stated that the Board will explore expanding multimedia rights, additional categories of rights, private sector partnerships in real estate and licensing, and strategies to address expense pressures and the increasing need for revenue.

Dr. Edwards reported that four University of Kentucky administrative leaders will serve on the Board: the President, who will serve as Chair; EVPFA and Co-EVPHA Eric Monday; Special Advisor to the President George Wright; and Vice President and Chief Strategy and Growth Officer Rob Edwards.

He explained that three external members will also serve on the Board: Shannon Arvin, President and CEO of Keeneland; Jacob Tamme, former UK and NFL standout; and Chris Prindiville, a college athletics executive with experience at Nike and Fanatics, adding that AD Barnhart will serve ex officio to the Board, and Paul Archey, President of JMI Sports, will serve as a special advisor.

Dr. Edwards concluded his report by outlining the proposed Board meeting structure and logistics.

#### VI. Other Business

Chair Melanson thanked Vice President Edwards and introduced EVPFA and Co-EVPHA Eric Monday to introduce the business items.

#### Proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

Dr. Monday introduced the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget for approval to recommend to the Finance Committee, adding key insights including a 3.5-year forecast and future growth investments.

Chair Melanson asked for a motion to approve. Trustee Berry moved approval and Trustee Lucas seconded the motion. It carried without dissent.

#### FCR 8 Internal Loan for Athletics

Dr. Monday introduced FCR 8, a recommendation that the Board of Trustees approve an internal loan to invest in capital projects throughout the Athletics' enterprise as part a multi-year plan and new governance and operating model, aimed at ensuring a strong financial trajectory for the program.

Chair Melanson asked for a motion to approve FCR 8. Trustee Shoop moved approval and Trustee Case seconded the motion. It carried without dissent.

FCR 17 Improve Athletics Facility 1 (Kroger Field Stadium Maintenance) Capital Project

Dr. Monday introduced FCR 17, a recommendation that the Board of Trustees approve the initiation of the Improve Athletic Facilities 1 (Kroger Field Stadium Maintenance) capital project.

Chair Melanson asked for a motion to approve FCR 17. Trustee Case moved approval and Trustee Lucas seconded the motion. It carried without dissent.

FCR 18 Improve Kroger Field 1 (Renovate Corner Suites and Elevators) Capital Project

Dr. Monday introduced FCR 18, a recommendation that the Board of Trustees approve the initiation of the Improve Kroger Field 1 (Renovate Corner Suites and Elevators) capital project.

Chair Melanson asked for a motion to approve FCR 18. Trustee Shoop moved approval and Trustee Berry seconded the motion. It carried without dissent.

FCR 19 Improve Soccer/Softball Facility Capital Project

Dr. Monday introduced FCR 19, a recommendation that the Board of Trustees approve the initiation of the Improve Soccer/Softball Facility capital project.

Chair Melanson asked for a motion to approve FCR 19. Trustee Lucas moved approval and Trustee Case seconded the motion. It carried without dissent.

FCR 20 Construct West End Zone Club Space Capital Project – Design and Construction Phases

Dr. Monday introduced FCR 20, a recommendation that the Board of Trustees approve the initiation of the design and construction phases of the Construct West End Zone Club Space capital project using the most cost-effective financing methods. It is further recommended that the Board support and approve the pursuit of legislative authority from the Commonwealth of Kentucky to enter into a Public-Private Partnership (P3) for the construction phase of the project and authorize the President, or his designee, to negotiate and execute all documents necessary to create a viable P3.

Chair Melanson asked for a motion to approve FCR 20. Trustee Case moved approval and Trustee Shoop seconded the motion. It carried without dissent.

FCR 21 Construct Kroger Field Fan Experience District Capital Project

Dr. Monday introduced FCR 21, a recommendation that the Board of Trustees support and approve the pursuit of legislative authority from the Commonwealth of

Kentucky for the Construct Kroger Field Fan Experience District capital project and authorize the President, or his designee, to negotiate and execute all documents necessary to create a viable P3.

Chair Melanson asked for a motion to recommend FCR 21. Trustee Lucas moved approval and Trustee Shoop seconded the motion. It carried without dissent.

Chair Melanson thanked Dr. Monday and introduced President Capilouto to introduce PR 5.

PR 5 Approval of the Board of Governors for Champions Blue LLC

President Capilouto introduced PR 5, a recommendation that the Board of Trustees, in response to the directive in PR 6 from the April 25, 2025, Board meeting, approve the nominations for the Board of Governors for Champions Blue LLC.

Chair Melanson asked for a motion to approve PR 5. Trustee Shoop moved approval and Trustee Berry seconded the motion. It carried without dissent.

VII. Adjournment

Chair Melanson reminded the Committee that the full Athletics Report had been loaded to Directors Desk. With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katie Hardwick', written over a horizontal line.

Katie Hardwick  
University Athletics Committee Secretary