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### By Jim Williamson

It may seem odd to approach a basketball writer for insight into football, but in this case, it's a perfect fit.

Kevin Flaherty is a national college basketball writer for 247Sports, but prior to that, he was Big 12 editor for 247Sports. Yours truly spent five seasons in the Memorial Stadium press box with him, covering the Fighting Manginos. He was always able to explain why plays worked or didn't, why games are as much about matchups as they are about talent and why you run certain plays in the first quarter so you can run other plays in the fourth. Not only is he knowledgeable, but Kevin is a proud Kansas alumnus; he bleeds crimson and blue.

So when I asked to talk with him about five Jayhawks who would make an impact this season, he was happy to talk.

### QB Peyton Bender, Itawamba (MS) C.C.

There's an old saying: You don't go get a junior college player to sit, and that goes double at quarterback.

It might go quadruple at Kansas. KU coach David Beaty went out and got Peyton Bender, whose Air Raid offense credentials are strong.

Kevin said, "He spent two years at Washington State under Air Raid guru Mike Leach before transferring to junior college. At Itawamba Juco, he averaged more than 300 yards passing and threw for 21 touchdowns against just four interceptions. 247 Sports rated him the #6 pro-style quarterback in the country."

QB backup QB Carter Stanley did a nice job of limiting mistakes and bringing toughness a year ago, but his lack of arm strength limited the offense. Bender has an arm better suited to what the Jayhawks are trying to do, Kevin said.

"With Bender's arm and good depth at wide receiver, KU could be able to test defenses more vertically this year."

### RB Dominic Williams, Frisco (TX) Independence H.S.

KU's rushing game struggled mightily last season due to what may have been the Big 12's worst offensive line. Ke'aun Kinner did Herculean work, rushing for 738 yards and averaging 5.3 yards per carry, but that was about it.

"Williams fills out the KU backfield," Kevin said. "He got a lot of interest from other schools and he's arguably

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the top high school prospect Beaty's signed at Kansas."

Williams was one of the most productive backs in the state of Texas, rushing for nearly 8,000 yards. He's quick and elusive, but Kevin said he has a quality that's just as important.

"He's decisive. He makes good decisions and runs with a lot of confidence. He could emerge as Kansas' best option at running back."

### **WRs Quan Hampton, Texas HS, and Kerr Johnson, Santa Rosa (CA) J.C.**

Hampton didn't commit until 10 days before National Signing Day, after KU was able to convince the then-Texas State commitment to take a late visit. He was only rated as 247Sports' 266th best wide receiver for good reason: He's tiny.

"He's listed at 5-foot-8 and 170 pounds. But the Air Raid offense will always find spots for players who can get open and turn a three-yard gain into a 20-yard gain," Kevin explained. Hampton is amazingly quick and shifty in the open field.

At 5-foot-11, Johnson is the other type of slot receiver you typically see in Air Raid offenses: an exceptional route-runner with soft hands who finds the open spot zone defenses and moves the chains.

### **DL J.J. Holmes, Hutchinson (KS) C.C.**

Kansas already had some serious talent on the defensive line. Dorance Armstrong and Daniel Wise would play anywhere. Holmes, however, brings a bit of a new element to the line next to those athletic types: brute strength.

Of the 6-3, 335-pound Holmes, Kevin said, "One opposing juco coach called Holmes 'country strong.' He has a lot of power and a punch that can stack up offensive linemen and allow others to make plays. His muscle will combine with the athleticism of teammates like Wise and Armstrong. He'll also allow Beaty to move Wise around and make him even more effective."

### **CB Hasan Defense, Kilgore (TX) J.C.**

No, we are not making that name up.

Defense arrives at a good time on Mt. Oread as KU looks to replace cornerbacks Marnez Ogletree and Brandon Stewart, both of whom helped make Kansas' third-down defense the best in the Big 12 last season.

"Whoever starts at corner for KU will benefit from a great pass rush, and the safeties will be improved this season, too" Kevin said.

It wasn't a big surprise when Defense won one of those crucial cornerback jobs in the offseason.


"He's got solid size – 5-11 – and strong coverage ability. He can tackle and has a knack for knocking down passes. Since he won the job in the spring, he has a leg up when it comes to learning the system. He'll make a big difference and help make a really good defensive unit even better."

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