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Kwinton Lassiter transcends the field in final year at Kansas

Nathan Ecker

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Photo courtesy of Jonathan Mouer.

Not all scripts have a perfect ending, but for University of Kansas (KU) cornerback Kwinton Lassiter, the conclusion of his college career ended in storybook fashion.

The Chandler native found himself back home for Christmas — in a stadium he frequented often, on a field where he would run the bases and in a state where the Lassiter name resonates with fans who remember the heroics of a defensive back who single-handedly secured the Arizona Cardinals' first postseason appearance as an NFL franchise in the Valley of the Sun.

Kwamie, Kwinton's father, was a household name during his time with the Cardinals from 1995-2002. The KU alumni secured four interceptions in a **16-13 victory** over Craig Whelihan and the San Diego Chargers in the final game of the 1998 season, propelling the franchise into the playoffs for the first time in 15 years. There was bedlam at Sun Devil Stadium as Kwamie and the Cardinals reveled in success that Arizona had yet to witness.

Twenty four years later Kwinton Lassiter found himself in a similar position as his father — playing the last game of the season with teammates at his back, his father's No. 8 on his jersey and the confidence of a thousand suns.

"Being home, it's a cool experience," Lassiter said. "Especially being able to have my teammates out here with me."

Lassiter began his college career at Butler Community College in El Dorado, Kansas — just as his father did. He played in nine games over two seasons before transferring to KU prior to the 2021 season. As a member of the Jayhawks, Lassiter did not see playing time right away, playing in five games over his first two seasons in Lawrence, Kansas.

Fate changed during the 2023 season as Lassiter found himself as a central part of the Jayhawks secondary. In the season opener on Sept. 1 against Missouri State University, he tallied his **first career interception** in Division I and a forced fumble. Lassiter followed up the hard-hitting performance with a **game-stealing interception** in the Jayhawks next contest, securing a 34-23 victory over the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

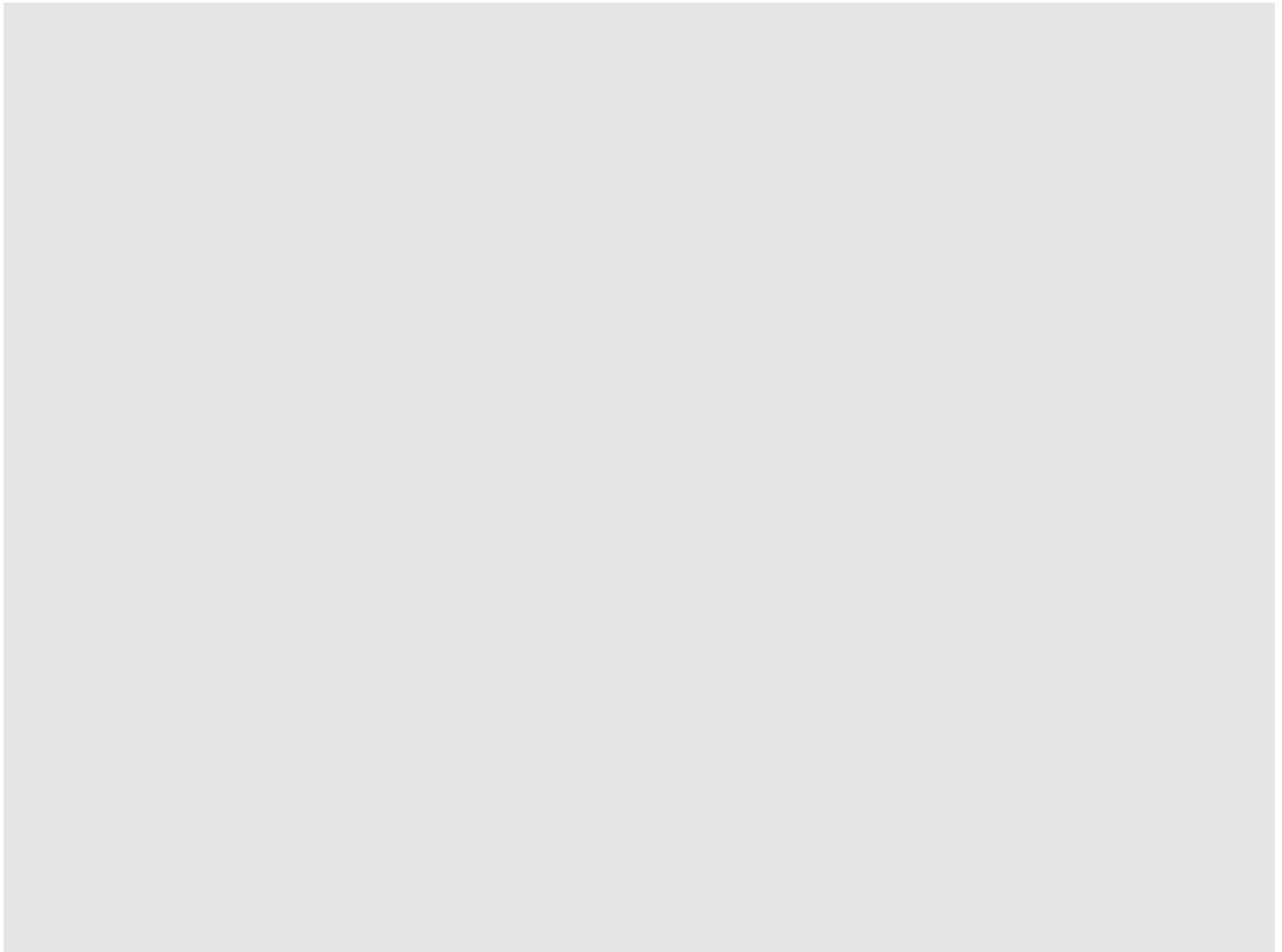


Photo courtesy of KU athletics.

As the season trudged on, Lassiter's teammates saw the man under the pads whose respect for the game and his peers transcended his play on the field.

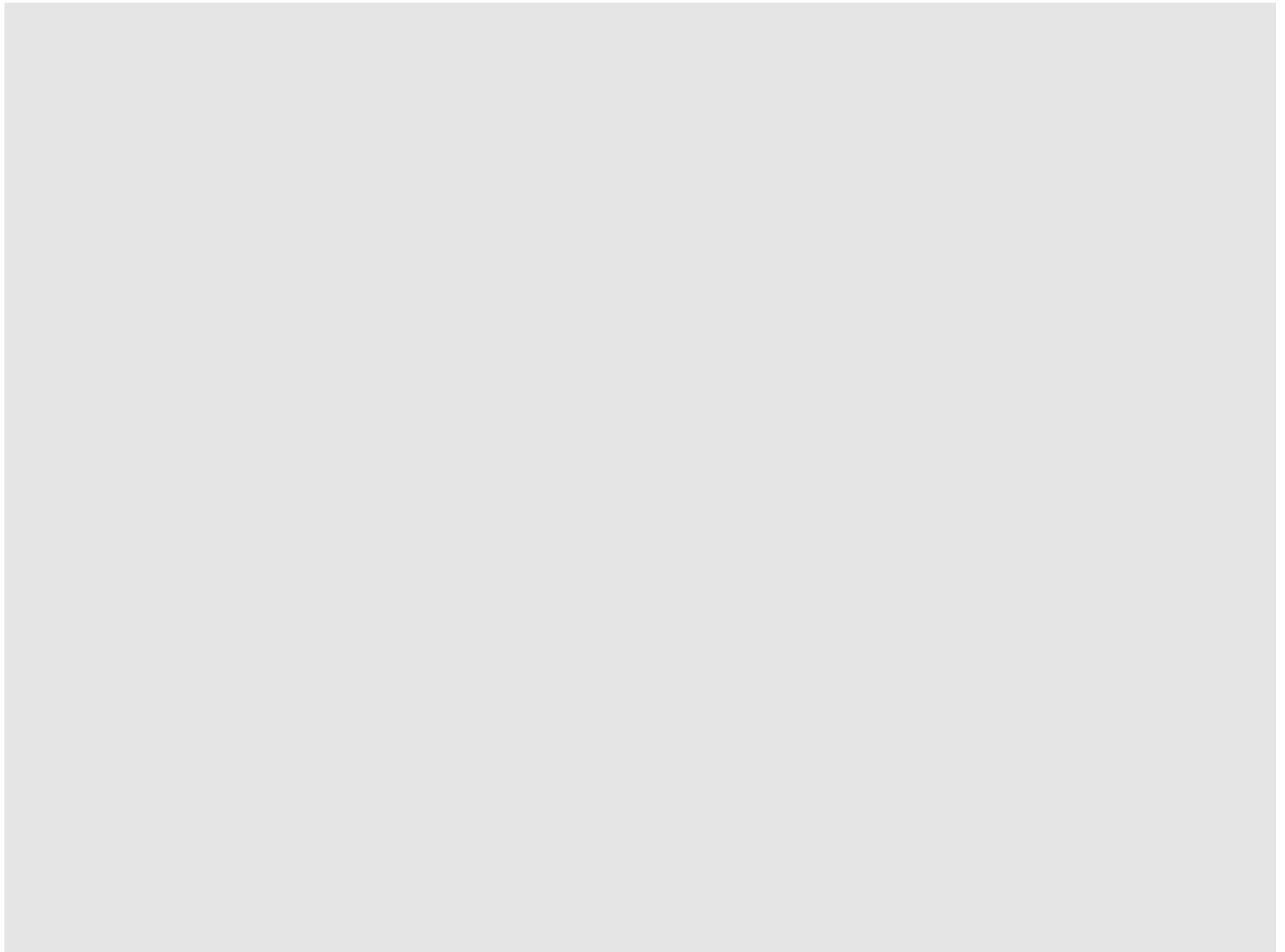
Senior linebacker Rich Miller Jr. grew close with Lassiter as the two became part of the first Kansas team to finish with a winning record since **2008**. Miller and Lassiter leaned on each other as they traversed senior seasons with uncertainty looming after they graduated.

"We really started getting closer and closer as the season went on," Miller said. "I remember when the season was starting to come to a close and we went to hit some golf balls and we just sitting there leaning on each other talking about our next moves and possibly what could happen, can't happen, stuff like that. We just keeping it real with each other."

Going out together meant more for the duo as their connection grew. The feeling was mutual between the 16 Kansas seniors who were seeking one final victory before their college careers came to a close at Chase Field in Phoenix.

“I think it’s real important for us to go out together and have fun and just do it big for one another,” Miller said.

Big is just how they did it, as Kansas defeated the University of Nevada, Las Vegas 49-36 in the Guaranteed Rate Bowl.



Kwinton Lassiter steps back to catch a pass from a teammate prior to the Guaranteed Rate Bowl at Chase Field on Dec. 26.

The victory marked the Jayhawks’ first bowl win in 15 years, but for Lassiter it represented the end of a college career that would not have been possible without the family he has behind him. Sacrifices, guidance and love was what Lassiter appreciated his family for and it meant the world

to play his final game in Phoenix where they could see him play without traveling 1,100 miles to Lawrence.

“Everything they gave me has helped me get to this point and be the person I am,” Lassiter said. “Big shout out to my teammates and coaches, but my family has been there, supported every decision I made and that means everything to me.”

Perhaps it is the Lassiter way, but regardless of performances on the field, those who grew close to No. 8 will always appreciate the reliability and respect that he brought to Kansas football.

Fellow senior safety Kenny Logan Jr. will miss the jokes and laid back attitude Lassiter brought to the table, though it is his willingness to be truthful when necessary that his teammates will never forget.

“You can call Kwinton at any time, and he’ll make sure he’s there for you,” Logan said. “He’s gonna joke, but he’s always going to push you to make sure you’re getting better any chance you can get.”

Over three years at Kansas, Lassiter did not stuff the stat sheet. He totaled just two interceptions and 23 tackles over 17 games played in a Jayhawk uniform. However, as a player he battled for years on end to slot himself into a position to make an impact on a Division I roster, showing the same determination as his father who helped lead Kansas to victory in the 1992 Aloha Bowl.

As a person, Lassiter continued a respected legacy that the No. 8 has had at Kansas for decades. He played with pride and treated those around him with a quiet kindness that will be missed by his Jayhawk teammates.

The future is uncertain for the Arizona native, but regardless of where Lassiter plays next, those who take the field with him can be guaranteed that he will play with a fire that runs in his DNA.

Nathan Ecker

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