

Coach Rupp's fears that Kentucky might be found lacking.

Actually, however, by mid season their record appeared to be about par for the course as other major cage powers experienced difficulties in high-calibre competition. With only three league games under their belts, the Ruppmen had forged into their long-familiar spot atop the SEC standings. Boasting a 3-0 mark after wins over Georgia Tech, Vanderbilt and LSU, the Kentuckians were now being referred to by many uninformed people as something short of a "solid" favorite to annex their 19th conference title and its automatic berth in the NCAA Regional, which will be staged in the UK Coliseum for the second straight year.

To Rupp, however, it seemed a different outlook: "We're not out of the woods yet just because Mississippi State (co-choice with UK for the title) has been beaten and some of the other league teams haven't showed as well as expected."

The showing of the Wildcats in their first 13 outings couldn't be favorably compared to any of the great Kentucky teams of the past, although many observers saw potential greatness in the group. Inconsistency bothered the club more than such factors as the lack of good offensive center play, the failure of All-Conference forward Johnny Cox to reach the performance peak expected and mistakes in both floor play and defense. On some occasions, such as the triple overtime thriller with Temple and the almost flawless triumph over St. Louis, Kentucky looked on a par with many of the better Wildcat outfits of the past. At other times, in defeat and in victory, there was some spark missing.

It took a rally in the final two minutes for the 'Cats to top Duke, 78-74, and prolong a record of not having lost a season opener at home since 1926. The Blue Devils were a pretty formidable outfit, though, having all hands back from the club that pasted a defeat on the Kentuckians at Durham last season.

Following success on the road against Ohio State, thanks to Vernon Hatton and surprising John Crigler, the Wildcats rounded out the toughest opening week in basketball by enter-

taining the Temple Owls at Lexington. Led by the fabulous Guy Rodgers, the Owls were considered the class of the East and lived up to their reputation by carrying the fight to Kentucky through the regulation 40 minutes and into three overtime stanzas. The Wildcats finally copped an 85-83 decision when Hatton gave them time to win with a fantastic heave from mid-floor with one second left in the first overtime.

Worn out from a strenuous opening week that saw them conquer three major intersectional foes and from a tiresome trek of several hundred miles to the game site, Kentucky proved ripe for upset and Maryland handed them their first loss in payment for their visit to College Park. The Terps, it should be pointed out, continued to press their luck successfully and knocked off many other good teams to gain national ranking.

Heading in the other direction, Kentucky next appeared in St. Louis and turned in their second vengeance performance by topping the Billikens of Eddie Hickey, who had won at Lexington last year. The 73-60 count that was on the scoreboard at Kiel Auditorium represented the Wildcats' most impressive showing of the season. But they couldn't stand prosperity, seemingly, as a decided underdog Southern Methodist club, which had very little except desire to recommend it, ground out a one-point win over the visiting Ruppmen two nights later in Dallas. The nationally third-ranked Wildcats left town with red faces, but worried more about their seeming Monday night jinx. They had lost to Maryland and SMU and had trouble with Duke, all on Mondays. On the remainder of the schedule, eight more Monday dates—some of them with important foes like Vanderbilt, Georgia Tech and Mississippi State—were upcoming.

But this was a team that had no time to look back or worry about the distant future. At hand was the most difficult two-night assignment handed any cage outfit—the UK Invitational Tournament featuring defending national champion North Carolina, Southern Conference champion West Virginia and unbeaten Minnesota of the Big 10. Kentucky felt like an

intruder at its own party as the other three clubs boasted undefeated records.

Everybody but West Virginia had it figured out that the first night could just as well be skipped. It was going to be a Kentucky-North Carolina clash in the finals. But the Mountaineers, tall and talented, had other ideas and handed their hosts a rude shock in the form of a 77 to 70 setback and, on the following night, copped the tournament title by stopping the Tar Heels' win streak at 37. An angry Kentucky crew stormed past Minnesota for consolation honors. Better than 20,000 paid to see the nation's outstanding tournament and each team received a record-sized check for \$11,751.38 as their equal share of the net proceeds.

Post-tournament action saw the Cats take anti-climatic decisions from Utah State and Loyola of Chicago before launching defense of their Southeastern crown against Georgia Tech. The Engineers, who later pushed the Cats into first place by upsetting Mississippi State, were completely outgunned by the Kentuckians and succumbed 73-60, thanks in great measure to Crigler's 25-point onslaught.

Their second league test and first on the road came as they faced Vanderbilt in Nashville for the first game in the new year. The Commodores, figured in pre-season as one of the prime challengers, had not been living up to expectations, but carried the fight right down to the wire in a fired up performance. Although ahead by slim margins much of the way, Kentucky had to call on "new" talent from the bench to win the televised spectacle. Senior guard Earl Adkins broke the back of the Commodores with his deadly accurate long shots and care-free, driving crips to contribute 25 vital points to a cause finally decided in Kentucky's favor, 86-81. All concerned in the Wildcat camp hoped that ended any ideas of a Monday jinx.

The meeting with LSU five nights later seemed anti-climatic to everybody except the fans. In an amazing display of drawing power, a near capacity throng of 11,300 turned out to witness the 97-52 slaughter of the last place team in the league which had never edged Kentucky.