

Villanova and Kentucky Wildcats



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Check out two schools that share a love for the same big cat.



If Villanova University and the University of Kentucky meet in the NCAA Tournament, it'll be a real catfight! Not only are both teams called the wildcats, even their mascots' names are similar: Villanova's is named "Will D. Cat" and Kentucky's is "The Wildcat."

Fighting Spirit

Kentucky sports teams got their feline name more than a century ago, after a teacher praised UK football players by saying they "fought like wildcats" on the field. But it wasn't until 1976 that The Wildcat, in his furry costume and #1 jersey, began cheering at games. Later, The Wildcat gained a baby brother, Scratch, who wears # $\frac{1}{2}$ on his shirt.

FUN FACT

Talk about paw-pular! More than 30 college sports teams have a wildcat as their mascot.

Villanova also didn't have a costumed cat at first. In fact, in the 1930s and 1940s, Nova used four different live bobcats—all named Count Villan—as mascots at games. However, bobcats are shy around people and do

not like crowds, so the job was unhealthy for them. In 1950, Villanova stopped using real animals. The University of Kentucky still has a live bobcat mascot named Blue—but he lives at a wildlife center, where he can enjoy his privacy!



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A bobcat prowls through grassland in the winter.

A Pouncing Predator

The word “wildcat” can be used for several different animals, including the lynx, caracal, and bobcat. Both Kentucky’s and Villanova’s mascots are based on bobcats, which live across most of the United States. Bobcats are smaller than mountain lions, and can be identified by their short “bobbed” tail (which is where their name comes from!) and tufted ears. With sharp claws and expert stalking skills, they are excellent hunters. Bobcats feed on rabbits, mice, birds, and even larger animals like sheep and deer. One was even photographed catching a shark at the beach!

Like their animal symbols, both of these schools are fierce foes on the basketball court. The Kentucky men’s team has won eight national championships, and the women’s team made the Sweet Sixteen twice and the Elite Eight three times between 2010 and 2016. Meanwhile, the Villanova men’s team knows how to bring down big opponents: They’ve defeated the #1 seed, which is the top-rated team, in the NCAA Tournament six times.

DID YOU KNOW?

For a few seasons in the 1980s, Kentucky had a new cat mascot that walked on stilts, in honor of two players called “The Twin Towers,” who were both 7 feet tall.