**By Kellis Robinett and John Kurz**

**JOHN: JOHN’S TAKE ON DANIEL SAMS**

Well, first of all, thank you for the invite, Kellis. I’ve always said that I’ll know that I’ve made it in this business when I get to make an appearance in Mellinger Minute ... er, wait, this isn’t Mellinger Minutes?

Here’s the deal:

This is all about upside. My Daniel Sams elevator pitch could be summed up by simply stating that the upside with Sams was higher than a four-loss loss season. K-State’s high-water (see what I did there?) mark with Waters was a 9-4 season that ended with a loss in the Alamo Bowl.

If Sams had three straight years of the coaching staff being all-in on him, and tailoring the offense to his skill set like the Wildcats did with Collin Klein, we would have seen him go off. Unfortunately, there was a clear divide between head coach and offensive coordinator when it came to who was going to play QB.

Sams fit the mold of a quarterback that plays to Bill Snyder’s sensibilities and was simply dynamic with the football in his hands. Three of his first six career carries were touchdowns. He averaged nearly six yards-per-carry during his K-State career, a number that dwarfs the career averages of Ell Roberson (4.7), Michael Bishop (4.1) and Collin Klein (4.1). He put 199 yards rushing and three touchdowns on eventual Big 12 champion Baylor in 2013 in a Klein-esque performance in which he toted the rock 30(!) times.

Oh, and while we’re on the subject of the game, let’s not forget that in back-to-back games against 10-plus win teams in Oklahoma State and Baylor in 2013, Sams had K-State on the verge of winning both without Tyler Lockett and Tramaine Thompson. No offense to Torrell Miller, who was a great dude, but it’s a tough task to go win games against top 10 teams with him as your No. 1 receiver.

The Oklahoma State game ultimately came down to a bogus fumble call with K-State driving deep in Cowboys territory to go up by two scores in the waning moments of the third quarter. If K-State wins that game with Sams willing the Wildcats to victory with arguably the best receiver in school history sidelined, the dynamics of that quarterback battle change drastically.

With his electric legs, a full complement of receivers at his disposal and full backing from the coaching staff and offensive system, Sams’ arm was still plenty good enough to win a lot of games at K-State.

He completed 72% of his passes at K-State. It was a very limited sample size, and obviously would have gone done with more volume, but Snyder always had a habit of winning big with athletic quarterbacks who struggled with accuracy. K-State won 11 games with Michael Bishop completing only 43% of his passes in 1997, Ell Roberson at 52% in 2002 plus Jonathan Beasley at 44% in 1999 and 49% in 2000.

There’s a reason that Sams, not Waters, was the only K-State quarterback to pick up any All-Big 12 honors from the coaches in 2013.

Plus, think of the branding opportunities that were there with Sams’ #life movement on twitter. I’m just saying.

**KELLIS: MY REBUTTAL FOR JAKE WATERS**

Look who’s got jokes! I would respond with a wisecrack about how nobody listens to AM radio anymore, but I appear on your show every Friday so that would hurt us both.

Much like with a pitcher in baseball, I don’t view wins as the ultimate statistic when it comes to grading quarterbacks. Patrick Mahomes never won more than seven games in a season at Texas Tech. He also never won a bowl game and had two losing seasons with the Red Raiders. Does that mean he was a bad college quarterback? I say no. And K-State lost both of the games you referenced when Sams shined as the primary QB, so I fail to see how he could have single-handedly guided the Wildcats to a Big 12 championship in 2014 as you suggest he may have. He was really freaking good in those games, though.

He went on to have a solid career at McNeese State that featured a FCS playoff appearance, but he was far from spectacular. He never completed even 50% of his passes in a season there.

All the while, Waters broke passing records at K-State and turned Curry Sexton into a 1,000-yard receiver.

Besides, his win total (or 9-4 ceiling, as you called it) would have been higher if not bad luck. If K-State’s defense stops North Dakota State from marching 80 yards in 18 plays late in the 2013 season-opener, that’s an extra win for Waters. If Tyler Lockett holds onto a touchdown pass or K-State doesn’t miss so many field goals against Auburn in 2014, the Wildcats win that game, too.

Let’s not blame Waters for every loss that occurred during that era. The fact of the matter is that the Big 12 was crazy good when Waters was a senior. That was the year that both Baylor and TCU were playoff contenders. Add in games against Auburn, Oklahoma and UCLA and K-State played five top 15 opponents that season. Waters didn’t get to warm up with four cupcake opponents and then go against the old Big 12 North. He faced the most difficult schedule of the modern K-State era.

Starting 7-1, climbing to No. 9 in the national polls and finishing 9-4 against that buzz saw should be celebrated, not ridiculed.

And I didn’t even mention the worst luck of all. Waters injured his throwing shoulder against Oklahoma and had to finish the season at far less than 100%. Not many quarterbacks are capable of beating TCU, Baylor and UCLA away from home with a throwing shoulder that requires surgery. But he still put up big numbers, throwing for 400 yards in a road victory over West Virginia late that year.

I’m not above wanting to know what would have happened had K-State coaches fully embraced Sams and let him run wild at quarterback. He could have been great, if he could have stayed healthy. But I also want to know what would have happened if K-State coaches had fully embraced Waters as the surgeon he was as a pocket passer and not asked him to run the ball an absurd 272 times. Had they used him like Chad May (687 pass attempts and 128 rush attempts) he could have thrown for even more yards, stayed healthy and maybe even reached a higher ceiling.

**JOHN: JOHN’S REBUTTAL FOR DANIEL SAMS**

You’re missing the point if you simply zero in on the fact that K-State lost those games against Oklahoma State and Baylor.

Sams was a redshirt sophomore without a start under his belt, taking on arguably the two toughest opponents on the schedule while handcuffed without his two most dynamic skill position players. What those games proved is that Sams absolutely had the ability to win big in this league. When Ell Roberson put on a dazzling show in Norman in 2001, a game that K-State lost 38-37, it was made abundantly clear that he was capable of putting together a special career. Nobody let the end result of that game get in the way of that fact.

Waters was given back the primary reigns to the offense after those two games in 2013, conveniently when Lockett and Thompson returned, and feasted on four straight opponents that finished a combined 16 games under .500 in the Big 12. How much further would Sams have developed if given the unbridled opportunity to be the primary quarterback through that stretch?

Sams wasn’t dynamic through the air at McNeese after he transferred, but we both know that his success was always going to be tied to his legs. He rushed for over 1,600 yards in two seasons at McNeese, including nearly 1,000 and 11 touchdowns as a senior. You don’t need to have an elite arm when you attract that level of attention on the ground. His elite playmaking ability was still there after going through a season of the quarterback carousel, a spring of playing wide receiver, and a transfer to a new school and a new system. That would be enough to stunt the growth of any quarterback.

We haven’t even addressed the fact that Sams had an extra year of eligibility on Waters. How much different does 2015 look with an elite athlete that’s now a three-year starter at QB?

Please don’t mistake my Sams love for Waters ridicule. The argument here is much more focused on what Sams had the potential to do as opposed to what Waters didn’t do. If we want to get technical about the path to a Big 12 championship in 2014, though, it’s fair to point out that K-State tried to beat TCU and Baylor at their own game. Getting into a shootout with Trevone Boykin or Bryce Petty was a fool’s errand. As good as Waters and Lockett were, they weren’t going to match the skill talent that the Bears and the Horned Frogs possessed. So, how could you take down those two?

I’d start by building an offense around a QB who is dynamic on the ground, will allow you to control time of possession and keep those high-octane offenses off of the field. If only we had proof that’s a Big 12 championship-caliber formula with Bill Snyder calling the shots. \*Insert 2012 highlight reel here\*

Listen, Waters deserves to be remembered as a very good quarterback at K-State. There’s no denying that he had an arm to rival virtually any Snyder quarterback, and his connection with Tyler Lockett was a blast to watch.

I’ll still go to my grave believing that the ceiling with Daniel Sams was higher than the Alamo Bowl.

This concludes my TED Talk.