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UA12/2/1 Topper Extra - Signing Day 2013

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WHAT WILL THE

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NEW KIDS IN TOWN

WKU unveils expansive 2013 signing class

LUCAS AULBACH

SPORTS@WKUHERALD.COM

The WKU football coaching staff underwent a total overhaul in December and January which ended with an entirely new group of coaches at the helm of the program.

On Feb. 6, they introduced their first signing class, the end result of a late, high-speed scramble for recruits in the wake of the coaching changes.

For all of the confusion that surrounded the program for the past couple of months, coach Bobby Petrino said at Wednesday's National Signing Day press conference that the day was almost completely stress-free.

"It was kind of uneventful," the new coach said. "Sometimes on Signing Day you are wheeling and dealing, faxing scholarships and losing guys, but basically today was a bit uneventful, though yesterday there were a few things that transpired that were fun."

The class is big in numbers and in significance for the program. WKU signed 33 players Wednesday — 20 more than the 13 that made up former coach Willie Taggart's final class in 2012.

The coaching staff hit three position groups hard on the recruiting trail — offensive line, defensive line and wide receiver.

WKU signed eight offensive linemen, the most of any position group.

The Toppers picked up six defensive linemen, a position which WKU will return no starters from last season.

The school also brought in six recruits at

wide receiver, one of the most important parts of Petrino's past offenses.

Petrino said receiver was one skill position on offense he felt he needed to hit hard.

"It was important that we did a great job at receiver, mainly because of the transitions, the different offensive styles, the number of quality running backs that were already on scholarships and the number of quality tight ends that were already on scholarships," he said.

WKU filled up the 2013 class with six defensive backs, four linebackers, a tight end, a kicker and a quarterback.

The additions on the lines might be most critical for WKU, which will lose 11 offensive and defensive linemen from last season.

The pickup of eight offensive linemen is a big step for the Toppers, but offensive line coach Mike Summers said it may be a while before any of the new recruits make an impact in a game.

"They're going to be playing against 22-year-old grown men, so they need some weight room work and development," Summers said. "But all of them are guys that show great potential, good prospects and guys I'm excited about working with."

The turnover on the defensive line also required WKU to spend some time recruiting the position.

The Toppers picked up four d-line recruits to counter losing seven defensive linemen from last season.

Two of those recruits are junior college transfers who have already joined the team, which defensive coordinator Nick



WKU Football Head Coach Bobby Petrino speaks at a press conference in the media room of Diddle Arena on Wednesday. **SETH FISCHER/HERALD**

Holt said could help shore up a line that needs experience.

"I think it's really good that we got two mid-year defensive linemen so they can practice with us now this spring, and they can lift weights and be around our strength coaches, so they'll really improve," Holt said. "I think they'll both help us play this year."

Those two linemen join six other re-

cruits — a total of two defensive linemen, three offensive linemen, a line back, a wide receiver and a defensive back — that enrolled early and have already joined the team in practice.

Those eight players had the pleasure of joining Petrino and the Toppers for workouts and drills in Smith Stadium at 5:50 a.m. Wednesday. The first spring practice of 2013 will take place in March.



HEALTHY DAYS

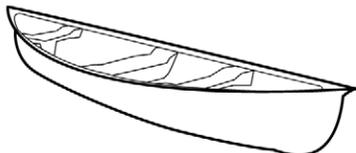
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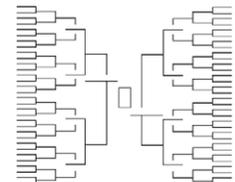
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UPON FURTHER REVIEW

Brohm, Petrino give WKU Louisville foothold

BRAD STEPHENS

SPORTS@WKUHERALD.COM

When it comes to recruiting the state of Kentucky, the city of Louisville matters more than the rest.

As one would expect, the state's biggest city produces more good high school teams and more Division I football players than anywhere else in the state.

In last year's signing class, former coach Willie Taggart began making an impact in the city, recruiting highly-rated running back prospect Ace Wales of Central High School and talented defensive tackle Tyrone Pearson of Seneca HS.

Hiring Bobby Petrino to replace Taggart ensured those inroads to the 502 area code would continue.

Petrino's first signing class had a strong Louisville flavor. Wide receivers Cam Lewis (Ballard HS) and Taywan Taylor (Pleasure Ridge Park HS) and defensive back Juwan Gardner (DuPont Manual HS) hail from Louisville. Another wide receiver,

Aaron Jackson of Frankfort HS, signed from right down the road.

It was also reported Tuesday night that three players from Class 6A state champion Trinity HS would walk on at WKU.

Topper fans can expect their team to land prospects from Louisville as long as Petrino is their coach and Offensive Coordinator Jeff Brohm is on their coaching staff.

In fact, there may not be many coaches in America better connected to the city than Petrino, a former U of L assistant and head coach, and Brohm, a former Trinity quarterback and U of L quarterback and assistant.

Petrino hasn't coached in the city since taking the Cardinals to the Orange Bowl after the 2007 season, but his name still carries plenty of weight there, Brohm said.

"They're glad he's back in the area," Brohm said of Petrino. "I know a ton of people in the Louisville area that are excited to watch Western Kentucky football and Coach Petrino."



BRAD STEPHENS
Columnist

Brohm's ties to Louisville run so deep that he has a younger brother, Brian, that also played quarterback at Trinity and at U of L. The Brohm family has connections all over the city, especially at powerhouse Trinity.

Enthusiasm for Petrino added to Brohm's history in the area make a Louisville a feeding ground for the Toppers.

Those are two big feathers in WKU's cap in their fight against two other up-and-coming, in-state programs for recruits.

U of L, after winning a BCS bowl and signing coach Charlie Strong to an extension, isn't going away anytime soon.

Neither is Kentucky, which just signed one of its best classes in program history under new coach Mark Stoops. One of the top players in that class is Trinity defensive end Jason Hatcher, another Louisville native.

Throw in some Midwestern schools like Purdue, Ohio State and Cincinnati that re-

cruit the Louisville area, and it's important a place like WKU have some built-in advantages to use there.

Like this year and the several before that, most of the Toppers' future signees will come from the South — specifically Florida.

But having several in-state guys in a signing class is important for fostering some local pride amongst a new group of players.

"(In-state) guys put a lot of effort into doing

the very best they can and to represent the state," Brohm said. "Obviously, you build a team with other guys around that, but to have a nucleus of guys that are from Louisville, from the state of Kentucky... I think is huge.

"We definitely want to get as many of those guys as we can on board."

The longer Petrino and Brohm stay at WKU, the more local kids will come on board.

I KNOW A TON OF PEOPLE IN THE LOUISVILLE AREA THAT ARE EXCITED TO WATCH WESTERN KENTUCKY FOOTBALL AND COACH PETRINO

— Jeff Brohm
WKU Offensive Coordinator

THE RECRUITS

OFFENSIVE

QB - Todd Porter - 6-3 - 195
WR - Aaron Jackson - 6-3 - 185
WR - Cam Lewis - 6-3 - 205
WR - Nicholas Norris - 5-10 - 170
WR - Taywan Taylor - 6-1 - 185
WR - Kylen Towner - 5-9 - 165
WR - Lonnie Turner - 5-10 - 180
TE - Shaquille Johnson - 6-4 - 215

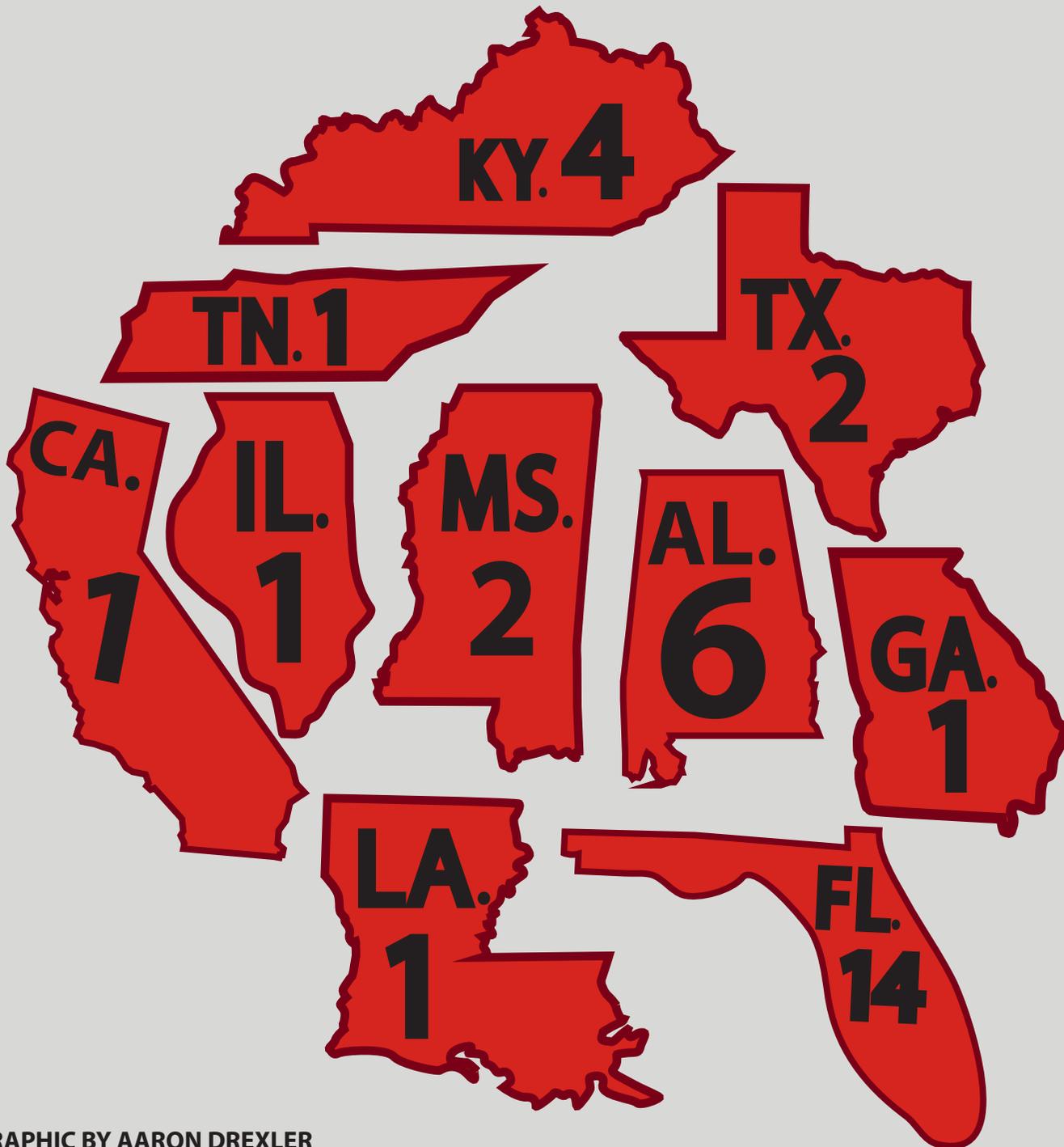
OL - Joe Fennell - 6-5 - 320
OL - Justin Martinez - 6-3 - 275
OL - Brandon Ray - 6-3 - 285
OL - Donald Rocker - 6-4 - 296
OL - Jimmie Simms - 6-5 - 285
OL - Johnny Delaney - 6-6 - 310
OL - Kyle Jones - 6-4 - 300
OL - Connor Popeck - 6-4 - 285

DEFENSIVE

DL - Demarcus Glover - 6-4 - 240
DL - D'Von Isaac - 6-4 - 275
DL - Tanner Reeves - 6-4 - 230
DL - Calvin Robinson - 6-5 - 225
DL - Maurice Bennett - 6-3 - 300
DL - Raphael Cox - 6-3 - 270
LB - Drew Davis - 6-1 - 215
LB - Isaac Tanner - 6-0 - 223

LB - Derrell Young - 6-1 - 205
LB - Devante Duclos - 6-0 - 216
DB - Juwan Gardner - 6-1 - 200
DB - Rashad Greene - 6-1 - 175
DB - Leverick Johnson - 6-1 - 190
DB - De'Andre Simmons - 5-11 - 180
DB - Marcus Ward - 6-3 - 204
DB - Dalton Patterson - 6-3 - 195
K - Joe Occhipinti - 6-3 - 190

Recruits by state



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Petrino's system the right fit for Jackson

BRAD STEPHENS
SPORTS@WKUHERALD.COM

If it hadn't been for Bobby Petrino, Aaron Jackson would've never found his way to WKU.

It's ironic because Petrino thought he was lost when he was finding his way to go meet Jackson.

Soon after taking over in December as WKU's coach, Petrino set out to recruit Jackson, a 6-foot-3-inch, 190-pound wide receiver from Frankfort High School.

FHS is a small high school that competes on the Class 1A level of KHSAA football — the level reserved for the state's smallest schools.

When Petrino pulled into town, the Toppers' first-year coach thought he'd taken a wrong turn.

"I was lost because when I drove up to the high school there was just one brick building," Petrino said. "I called the coach and said 'I was supposed to be here and the GPS said I was here, but I don't see anything but one building.'"

"He said, 'Oh yeah that's it, come on in.'" Soon enough Petrino made his way in and met Jackson. By January, the receiver had committed to play football at WKU.

Jackson signed his letter of intent Wednesday, joining five other wide receivers to become part of the Toppers' 33-man 2013 signing class.

Petrino's wide-open, spread offense —

a system that uses wide receivers much more than that of Petrino's predecessor, Willie Taggart — was a major draw for Jackson, FHS coach Craig Foley said.

"Before the coaching change, I don't know that Western was (a good fit)," Foley said. "Now with the coaching change, who wouldn't want to play in that type of offense? It's exciting."

Jackson had an impressive prep career at FHS, capped off by a 48-catch, 1,251-yard, 15-touchdown season in 2012. He also played defense, tallying 79 tackles, three interceptions and four fumble recoveries for the 11-2 Panthers.

Several schools, including Navy, Air Force and Bowling Green offered Jackson a scholarship. Some of those schools wanted him to play in college as a defensive back. Petrino's offense was the deciding factor in signing with the Toppers, he said.

"I had talked to Western a little bit, but as far as their offense before Petrino came,

they didn't need any more receivers because of the offense they had," Jackson said. "If it wasn't for Petrino, I probably wouldn't have ended up at Western. It was a good spot."

During their talks, Petrino compared Jackson to former Louisville wide receiver and current Atlanta Falcon Harry Douglas. Playing under Petrino, Douglas was a first team All-Big East receiver in 2006 and 2007 and a second team AP All-American in 2007.

Like Jackson, Douglas made a name for himself as a big, sure-handed target at wideout.

"(Petrino) was just comparing me to him

and said if I want to get to the next level after college, I should commit to Western," Jackson said.

Jackson also reminds wide receivers coach Lamar Thomas of another prolific college wideout — himself.

Thomas tallied more than 1,500 receiving yards during a three-year career at Miami, helping the Hurricanes to national

championships in 1989 and 1991. He was later featured in ESPN's 30 for 30 documentary, "The U."

"When I watched (Jackson), I thought of myself a lot," Thomas said. "I played on a team with a lot of fast guys, but I was the one that caught a lot of passes and that's what it all boils down to."

"You're looking for the most consistent guy, the guy that makes plays... That's what I see in Aaron."

Petrino promised Jackson he'd have a chance to play his freshman year rather than redshirt, Jackson said.

That means he'll have a chance to take the field against an old friend and rival in his first collegiate game.

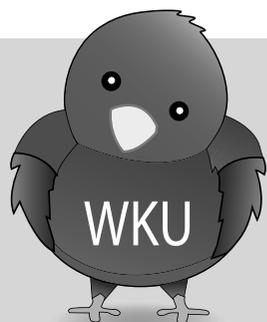
Wide receiver Ryan Timmons of Franklin County High School, FHS' crosstown rival, signed his letter of intent with Kentucky Wednesday. Jackson and Timmons, a Rivals.com four-star prospect, played youth league, middle school and high school football against each other.

On Aug. 31, Jackson's Toppers will face Timmons' Wildcats at LP Field in Nashville for each player's collegiate debut.

"I told (Timmons) we won't need any trick plays this year, we're just going to beat you all," a smiling Jackson said. "I said I'll see you the 31st, and he said alright."

“IF IT WASN'T FOR
PETRINO, I PROBABLY
WOULDN'T HAVE ENDED
UP AT WESTERN.”

— Aaron Jackson
Football recruit



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Toppers recruit another QB to compete for starting job

LUCAS AULBACH
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Through thick and thin, Kawaun Jakes served as starting quarterback for the past three seasons and was a big part of WKU's run to its first FBS bowl game this season.

With Jakes, a senior who has played his last game for WKU, out of the mix, there is currently a gaping hole at quarterback in the Topper depth chart.

WKU had three quarterbacks on its roster who were expected to compete for the starting job — freshmen James Mauro and DaMarcus Smith and sophomore Brandon Doughty.

Topper fans can add a fourth name to that list. The only quarterback WKU signed Wednesday was Todd Porter of O'Fallon Township High School in O'Fallon, Ill.

Porter, who threw for 3,009 yards and 22 touchdowns last year, was praised for his athleticism by O'Fallon coach Brandon Joggerst.

"He's got a very athletic arm and is very mobile," Joggerst said. "He throws very good off the run and is certainly a dual-threat kid. He definitely has the ability to make all the throws."

Porter's strong high school numbers impressed WKU coach Bobby Petrino, who said Porter was his No. 1 choice when the coaching staff was looking at quarterbacks to recruit.

Petrino said the most impressive thing about Porter was his experience — he was

the starting quarterback at O'Fallon over the past three years.

"When you start as a sophomore in high school and play with older guys it gets you used to the competition and the pressure," Petrino said. "We really felt like that was a big deal in the decision we made to take him. I think he is going to be a great player for

us."

Offensive coordinator Jeff Brohm was also pleased with the pickup.

Brohm, a former quarterback at Louisville and in the NFL, said the WKU coaching staff knew they were only going to offer a scholarship to one passer and spent

a lot of time evaluating potential quarterbacks before extending the offer to Porter.

"We think we found our guy," Brohm said. "He's very relaxed and poised in the pocket, he's a natural thrower, he's got big hands, he's got athleticism. He can do a lot of things — he's a very good student, he loves the game of football, and he puts in the time."

Smart money might say the starting job for the 2013-14 campaign will go to a returning player, but Joggerst said Topper fans shouldn't count out the new kid just yet.

"He's got a very high football IQ, and I think that's his thought process going in there, to get in there and compete and go in with the thought process that the job is up for grabs," he said. "I definitely think he can go in there and validate himself."

“HE DEFINITELY HAS THE ABILITY TO MAKE ALL THE THROWS.”

— Brandon Joggerst
O'Fallon football coach

POSITION	QB	RB	FB	WR	TE	OL	DL	LB	DB	K/P
OUTGOING SENIORS	1	0	0	6	1	8	6	4	6	1
INCOMING RECRUITS	1	0	0	1	2	4	7	2	3	0

WKU coaching staff took advantage of Louisville roots in 2013 recruitment

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In previous seasons under coach Willie Taggart and crew, WKU football was largely represented by Florida natives and products of a recruiting trail in the Deep South.

Wednesday, 33 new members were added to the Hilltopper roster from seven different states. While 17 of them came from Alabama and Florida, the Toppers also picked up four players from Kentucky.

Louisville is home to three of the new WKU players — defensive back Juwan Gardner, wide receiver Cam Lewis and wide receiver Taywan Taylor. The fourth Kentucky-native commit, wide receiver Aaron Jackson, is from

Franklin High School in Franklin. Petrino has significantly strong ties to the Louisville area.

He first moved there in 1998 as an offensive coordinator under coach John L. Smith.

In his one season with the Cardinals, Louisville had the top-ranked offense in Division I-A in scoring and total offense and posted the biggest turnaround among I-A football teams.

Petrino returned to Louisville as coach from 2003-2006 — the Cardinals went 41-9 during that period.

New Offensive Coordinator Jeff Brohm also relied on strong Louisville networking to secure commitments from WKU recruits.

“We’re going to take advantage of that relationship we have,”

said Brohm, who played quarterback at Louisville from 1989-1993 and was an assistant coach at the school from 2004-2009. “Obviously, I know a lot of guys

“WE’RE GOING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE.”

— Jeff Brohm

Offensive Coordinator

in Louisville and they’re aware of me. Not only do I know about all of the schools, my family and friends know about all the schools, so they’re going to relay information to me even when I don’t ask.”

The 2013 signing group features significant key additions on the offensive and defensive lines to fill the hole left by a lineman-heavy senior class — WKU graduated two starting offensive linemen and all four starters on the defensive line.

The addition of Lewis and Taylor at the receiver positions was another area that was a priority on the recruiting agenda.

“When you look at the overall class, it was important that we did a great job at receiver — mainly because of the transitions, the different offensive styles, the number of quality running backs that were already on scholarships and the number of quality tight ends that were already on scholarships,”

Petrino said.

He said it’s important for the team to have “some great competition” not only during practices but potentially in the regular season.

“Taywan Taylor is a guy that coach Brohm identified as a real playmaker,” Petrino said at Wednesday’s press conference. “He’s the style of a receiver that can not only run great routes and get down field, but he’s also very difficult to tackle after he has the ball in his hands... I really feel like he’s a guy that has a chance to come in and compete for playing time right away.”

With a coaching staff full of Louisville connections, it’s unlikely WKU will slow down recruiting in the big city any time soon.

Coaching ties to Louisville

Coach Bobby Petrino - Former Louisville offensive coordinator (1998) and coach (2003-06)

Offensive Coordinator Jeff Brohm - Former Louisville quarterback (1989-93) and assistant coach (2004-09)

Defensive Coordinator Nick Holt - Former Louisville defensive line coach (1998-2000)

Offensive Line Coach Mike Summers - Former Louisville offensive line coach (2003-06)

Secondary Coach Mike Cassity - Former Louisville defensive coordinator (2004-07)

Defensive Tackles Coach L.D. Scott - Former defensive lineman at Louisville (2006-09)

Running Backs Coach Kolby Smith - Former running back at Louisville (2003-06)