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WKU FOOTBALL

Helton finalizes 2020 signing class

WKU signs four on National Signing Day to complete list of 21 signees

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Western Kentucky head coach Tyson Helton watches a play Saturday during WKU's 30-14 win over Charlotte at Houchens-Smith Stadium.

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The heavy workload Tyson Helton's staff took on in the early signing period allowed for a slower approach in the second part of the signing period.

On what has traditionally been tabbed as National Signing Day, Western Kentucky announced just four newcomers in the 21-member Class of 2020, which is Helton's first products of a full recruiting cycle as the Hilltoppers' head coach.

WKU signed 15 players in the early signing period in December and announced six more additions between that Dec. 18 early signing day and what was at one point the biggest signing day of the year on the first Wednesday of February.

“We positioned ourselves to be in a really good spot after the early signing period,” Helton said. “We met a lot of needs and then we can sit back and look at holes we needed to fill. We were able to do that."

Since WKU’s addition of 15 players in December, it announced the signings of quarterback Darius Ocean (6-0, 195 pounds, Cornelius, N.C.) and junior college cornerback Dominique Bradshaw (6-0, 180 pounds, West Dallas, Texas).

Helton’s four Wednesday additions included in-state signee from Campbellsville Malachi Corley (6-0, 190), offensive lineman Quantavious Leslie (6-3, 300, Rome, Ga.), defensive back Kendrick Simpkins (6-0, 195, Montgomery, Ala.) and defensive end JaQues Evans (6-2, 240, Dublin, Ga.).

WKU’s 2020 class features five defensive backs, four offensive linemen, three defensive linemen, three wide receivers, two quarterbacks, two linebackers, a running back and a tight end. Seven of those members hail from Georgia and three from Kentucky, and an assortment of players signed from eight other states.

“All four of those guys, we (knew we) can take our time and evaluate and get past the first signing period - guys who wanted to wait anyways,” Helton said. “I think they were smart in playing it out, so I was glad we were able to get them in the end. We were able to take it slower this time around.”

Helton said he's still keeping three or four more spots open to explore the transfer market before spring practice begins. WKU just last week announced the addition of linebacker Will Ignont from Tennessee, where Helton served as offensive coordinator for the 2018 season before returning to WKU.

Helton's second season could see the addition of another quarterback from the transfer market, but nothing is set in stone yet. It worked out well last year for the Hilltoppers with Ty Storey, who transferred from Arkansas and led WKU to a 9-4 record.

WKU's current quarterback room includes redshirt senior Steven Duncan coming off an injury after starting the first three games last season before an injury, backups Davis Shanley, Kevaris Thomas and Sean McCormick. Helton will welcome two quarterback signees in Ocean and Washington native Grady Robison.

"We felt like we're in a position with older guys at quarterback," Helton said. "The transition there of losing Ty, we really felt like we needed to sign two. Felt like both our freshmen were good fits for us. Really excited about Darius. He's been here for two weeks now. Very good arm talent, a guy that has a quiet confidence about him. I'm excited to see him in spring practice.

"I love competition in the quarterback room. I love our quarterback room. The guys that have been there, either one of those guys can start for us. There has to be competition there and what better way to do it than find a quality transfer quarterback, particularly a guy that has been

in the fire and needs a new start. We'll continue to always look for that guy. Ty did a great job for us. He's that model we're looking for in a transfer quarterback."

Here's a look at WKU's six additions since the Early Signing Period

Darius Ocean, QB, 6-0, 195, Hough High School (Cornelius, N.C.)

Ocean threw for 1,858 yards and 21 touchdowns as a senior, while also tallying 63 carries for 91 yards and a touchdown. Earned 1-Meck 4A All-Conference honors. Ocean was rated a two-star with a 78 overall composite score by 247Sports. Chose WKU over Georgia State.

Dominique Bradshaw, CB, 6-0, 180, Navarro College/Grand Praire HS (West Dallas, Texas)

Bradshaw helped lead Navarro College to a 2019 SWJCFC Title while recording 24 tackles and 11 pass breakups. Was rated a three-star with an 84 overall composite score by 247Sports, ranking 136th in the country among all JUCO players, 20th nationally among JUCO cornerbacks and 19th in the state among JUCO players. Chose WKU over others such as Marshall, Old Dominion, UTEP, UTSA and Utah.

Quantavius Leslie, OL, 6-3, 300, Rome HS (Rome, Ga.)

Leslie was named to the Georgia Class 5A First Team in 2019 by the Atlanta Journal Constitution and the All-Region 7 Team in 2018. Leslie was rated a three-star with an 87 overall composite score by 247Sports, ranking 547th in the country among all players, 33rd nationally among

offensive guards and 61st in the state. Chose WKU over others such as Appalachian State, Florida, Liberty, Memphis, Michigan State, Mississippi State, NC State, Tennessee, Troy, Virginia Tech and West Virigina.

Kendrick Simpkins, DB, 6-0, 195, Defensive Back, Robert E. Lee HS (Montgomery, Ala.)

Simpkins earned Alabama Class 7A Second Team honors and played in the 33rd Annual Mississippi-Alabama Football Classic. Simpkins was rated as a three-star with an 84 overall composite score by 247Sports, ranking 92nd nationally among safeties and 51st in the state.

JaQues Evans, DE, 6-2, 240, Dublin HS (Dublin, Ga.)

Evans rushed for 2,531 yards on 262 carries (9.7 yards per rush) and scored 42 total touchdowns, leading the Irish to a Class 2A state title, their first since 2006. Was named Georgia Class 2A Offensive Player of the Year by the Associated Press. Listed as a MaxPreps Small Schools Second Team All-American. Also serves as the punter and kickoff specialist for the Irish. Currently averaging a team-high 14.1 points for the Dublin High School basketball team. Evans was rated a three-star with an 87 overall composite score by 247Sports, ranking 697th in the country among all players, 40th nationally among “athletes” and 70th in the state. Chose WKU over others such as Arizona State, Miami, Tennessee and USF.

Malachi Corley, WR, 6-0, 190, Campbellsville HS (Campbellsville, Ky.)

Corley accumulated 698 receiving yards, 541 rushing yards, 21 total touchdowns and scored 136 of the Eagles' 387 points. Earned Third Team All-State honors from the Courier-Journal coaches poll. Was named Class 1A Player of the Year and the District 2 Player of the Year by the Kentucky Football Coaches Association. Currently averaging 15.8 points, 8.1 rebounds, 4.6 assists and 2.4 steals for the basketball team. Corley was rated a three-star with an 81 overall composite score by 247Sports, ranking 20th in the state.

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