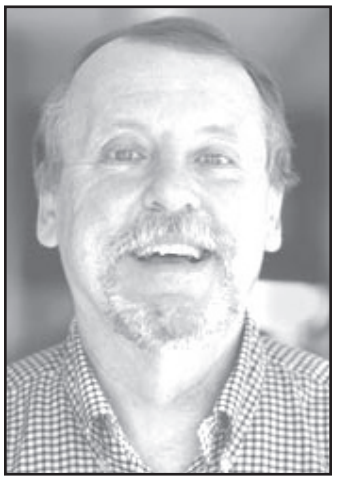


Academics played major role in Bowling Green tight end Jordan Dingle picking Kentucky



by Larry Vaught

Jordan Dingle is what his father calls an “analytical thinker” with a grade-point average above 4.0. Jordan Dingle is what college football coaches call a rising star.

The 6-5, 235-pound Bowling Green tight end is one of the players expected to sign with Kentucky next week after verbally committing to the Cats over Purdue, Vanderbilt, Virginia Tech and Georgia Tech.

“He wrote down all the pros and cons for all the places recruiting him,” said Justice Dingle Sr., Jordan’s father. “Kentucky, Vanderbilt, Purdue, Georgia Tech and Virginia Tech were the ones he honed in on above Ohio State and others where he also had offers.”

“A lot of folks thought he would go to Purdue. A lot were banking on Vanderbilt because of his high academics. Some thought Purdue because of his relationship with (assistant coach) Ryan Wallace who is from Bowling Green.”

Arkansas, South Carolina, Louisville and others had also offered Dingle, who ranks among the top 20 tight ends in the 2021 recruiting class. He had 35 catches for 474 yards and five scores in 2019 and has 36 catches for 473 yards and two scores in 10 games this year and is one of six Purples with 10 or more catches on a team that averages only about 20 passes per game. Bowling Green plays at Covington Catholic in the Class 5-A state semifinals Friday.

Kentucky is not known for featuring tight ends in the passing game under coach Mark Stoops but has recently, including when Dingle was watching which helped convince him what could happen in future with the offense.

“He sees how the program has continued to grow year after year. He has a good relationship with Stoops and (recruiting coordinator/tight ends coach Vince) Marrow. They recruited him harder than any other coaches,” Justice Dingle said.

“One of the things coach Stoops talked to us about was that he wanted really good athletic tight ends on the team so he can throw more. He has not really had the tight ends that can run routes like Jordan and has the athletic ability that he has.

“Coach Stoops also told us he would take care of our son and that UK had everything he wanted academically and athletically. They were very persistent with their recruiting.

Academics mattered, too. Jordan Dingle plans to major in health care administration.

“UK has a great program and has both an undergrad and Masters program in his major. Nobody else on his list had anything like that,” Dingle’s father said.

Dingle can also look like a hybrid receiver on the field and sometimes his athleticism makes it easy to not realize how big he is.

“When he comes off that line he puts his mind on he is a receiver with how well he runs routes,” his father said. “He uses his hands well and has good footwork. He’s a very balanced kid, very smart. He knows all the positions because of how he studies the game.”

“He can block but he’s also really able to go catch the ball. You will be really impressed after he catches the ball. Normally in high school it will take four or five guys to drag him down. He drags people with him. A lot of college coaches really like that he would get five to 10 yards after catching the ball every time. I don’t think you will ever see one guy pull him down in high school.”

Dingle is a three-sport athlete who also plays basketball and runs track. In track, he threw the shot put but also ran the hurdles — an event few his size even attempt. He also played baseball at one time.

“He did the hurdles to help with the flexibility of his hips. That’s one thing coaches told us really helped him. He did that to help with his agility in football and basketball and it worked,” Justice Dingle Sr. said.

Dingle will not be an early enrollee at UK in January because Bowling Green High School does not allow early graduation.

“He would love to enroll in January but he will be fine. He is a very humble, low key kind of kid. He’s not one to make a lot of noise about anything,” Dingle Sr. said. “He is self driven. You never have to talk to him about academics or staying on top of things. He’s a good kid and a really good football player. We’re very proud of him.”

Emotional Season

Trying to express the emotional strain his players went through this season was something coach Mark Stoops said he really could not put into words.

It started during the off-season when linebacker Chris Oats, who was expected to be one of the team’s captains and best players, had a medical issue that left him in a wheelchair. COVID-19 protocols isolated players a lot and they had to deal with offensive line coach John Schlarman’s death at midseason.

“The players literally watched one of their heroes deteriorate and eventually pass away and it was devastating for them,” said one person close to the UK football program. “It’s just hard for the general public and media to understand how difficult this season has been for players and coaches.”

Kentucky has also played three teams in the top 10 — Alabama, Georgia and Florida — the second half of the season.

“I don’t really want to get into specific words or details on how difficult it is because people will say it is an excuse. I think you and I personally know about it and I know it’s been definitely one of the most trying times,” Stoops said when I asked him about the emotional strain of this season before the South Carolina

game.

“Certainly, one of the most trying coaching experiences of my life and I’ve been through some tough ones. But again, I don’t really want that to be the headline because it’s about the players. I am paid to do this job, I can accept it, I can shoulder it, I’ll be fine. I do care about our players and I do care about their mental and physical well-being. It’s been very trying on them.”

Stoops is proud of his team’s resilience during the year. Not a single player opted out until cornerback Kelvin Joseph did last week. Kentucky also played at Alabama without 16 players and some staff members due to COVID and then had 18 players and 10 staff members missing at Alabama when it played. It was close to 20 again last week against South Carolina.

“We have had players not play to the standard that they expect of themselves, that we expect out of them. That’s coaching, that’s us getting through it, it’s us dealing with circumstances. Some people deal with better than others. But I still love each and every one of them,” the UK coach said.

“They have really fought, and I think it does say a lot about us because it’s really easy to look around the country. It’s really easy to just say I give, I submit, I quit and look for a rock to hide under but no one’s doing that here and we aren’t going to do that.

“I appreciate that and I respect our players and it says a lot about them. I do love this team.”

Kentucky finished the regular season with a 41-18 win over South Carolina and about 13 hours later Stoops announced offensive coordinator Eddie Gran and quarterback coach Darin Hinshaw would not be back next year. Kentucky’s offense ranked 105th out of 127 nationally in scoring and 117th in total yards per game.

Stoops said he had a good relationship with both coaches.

“It was a difficult time, but I also have to recognize I have a responsibility to our players, to our fans, to our administration,” Stoops said about the coaching dismissals. “Sometimes change is necessary. I felt like this is certainly one of those times.”

Dre’una Edwards

Sophomore Dre’una Edwards scored a career-high 27 points with a career-tying 15 rebounds in a 70-50 win over Belmont — the first UK player with at least 27 points and 15 rebounds since Evelyn Akhator in 2017. She followed that with 16 points, 12 rebounds, four steals, two assists and one block in a win at Kansas State and then had 14 points and 10 rebounds in a comeback win over No. 13 Indiana.

Edwards was the Pac-12 freshman of the year before transferring to UK and sitting out last year while she rehabbed an injury.

Edwards credits her family with putting the intensity into her that she shows on the court.

“I was always taught to be a dawg regardless. I grew up with a lot of siblings (nine). I have three older brothers. I’ve always played basketball with them, so they always told me to go hard all

the time, and I think that is just my mentality,” she said.

That early family competition enables her to play with skills and transition speed that not many 6-3 players have.

“I have older brothers who always push me regardless, so I was always playing basketball with boys when I was younger. If I grabbed a board, they were always telling me to go and don’t stop until someone stops you,” Edwards said. “So I just have that mentality all the time.”

She can also be a physical player in the paint who can power her way to the basket.

“I feel like that is just a part of basketball. You have to be physical regardless, so I love being physical. It’s just part of my game,” the UK sophomore said. “It’s just something that I’ve grown up loving to do my whole life.”

What she always has not done is hit shots from outside, especially 3-point range. She insists she can now.

“I think coming from Utah, I had a shoulder injury, so no one really knew that I could shoot the ball,” Edwards said. “Coming in, as soon as I got my shoulder fixed, I was ready. I was practicing all the time, and practice makes perfect, they say. I just had to keep going and practicing all the time.”

Jacob Toppin

Kentucky sophomore Jacob Toppin gave the nation a look at what he could do for UK this year when he got six second-half points in the loss to Kansas.

Maybe his brother, Obi Toppin — the best player in college basketball last season and the recent No. 8 pick in the NBA draft by the New York Knicks — was right about his younger brother’s potential when he said he felt he could one day join him in the NBA.

“It means a lot because that’s my brother and I look up to him. I’m just trying to work every day, getting better in the gym and hopefully one day that dream can come true,” said Top-

pin, a transfer from Rhode Island.

The Knicks also have former UK players Kevin Knox, Julius Randle, Nerlens Noel, Michael Kidd-Gilchrist and Nick Richards on the roster.

“I’m from New York so I was always really a New York Knicks fan. And that’s big for my brother because he was a Knicks fan too, so to be able to play for the Knicks, that’s big time,” Jacob Toppin said.

“I’m going to try to watch all the games because I want to see my brother play. I want to see his development and how he does. I’m definitely looking forward to that. I’m just going to keep working every day and hopefully I can get to that point.”

The Toppin brothers got their athleticism from their father.

“I used to watch him play all the time when I was younger whether it was in street ball games or whether it was in the city playing at parks,” Jacob Toppin said. “He is -- he was -- a great player.”

Stress

a little something for all of us

Did you ever catch yourself with your shoulders pulled up around your ears, clenching your teeth, or just being edgy with someone near you and wonder to yourself, “What is happening to me?” Or maybe you find yourself thinking about an upcoming event that feels a bit unpredictable like a job interview or a final exam, and notice your breathing is shallow and your heart is racing.

Our body is amazing; it gets us ready to handle events we think are challenging by sending hormonal messages that instruct it to get ready to meet the demands. This is the self-contained system we call the fight/flight/freeze response and it is intended to cope with stressful – good or bad – situations. It helps us to confront situations by giving us extra energy and the ability to focus so we can respond appropriately.

Under most conditions our stress response is a good thing; however, if we can’t fight the situation, or run away from it, we might find those hormones that get us prepared, begin to build up. This leaves us with an increase in blood pressure that keeps our muscles tense, our energy high, and keeps us on edge for extended periods. This puts extra pressure on the body and can make us more likely to get sick. Stress is something that we cannot get away from because it is a response to both happy and unpleasant events in our lives. Regardless of the source, managing it effectively should be a priority.

How do you know when you are stressed?

- My muscles get tense, particularly in my lower back, neck, jaw and shoulders
- I get a headache and/or stomachache
- I get irritable with my family, co-workers and friends
- I feel completely worn out and drained

Is stress a bigger deal with diabetes?

Yes. Part of the body’s system that prepares us to manage stress also releases the hormone glucagon, which causes your blood sugar to increase. For people without diabetes, their pancreas produces insulin to combat this increase, but those with diabetes have to rely on medication or other methods to decrease blood sugar levels. If you deal with stress by emotional eating or sitting around, blood sugar levels can be high for an extended period of time. If you experience chronic stress, then more damage can be done to your body.

What negative things do you do to relieve your stress?

- Consume alcohol in excess
- Smoke cigarettes
- Eat chips, ice cream, candy, pizza, etc., in excess
- Avoid people
- Watch TV, play video games, in excess

Each of these is identified as negative because it does not help reduce the build-up of stress. Each of these may temporarily help, but we are still left with the consequences, which have long-term health implications.

What should I do about my stress?

If you can’t change it, change your mind. Look at it differently, as not so serious, or find a positive way to see things. While we might not be able to change a situation we often have the ability to change how we see it. For example, you might find yourself stuck in traffic and know you will be late for an appointment. You could become very tense, grip the steering wheel very tightly and try to weave around everyone to get there a minute earlier. Or you could change your mind, turn on some soothing music and remind yourself, it is not the end of the world and one or two minutes isn’t going to make a difference.

If you can’t change it or change your mind, then let it go. We often build anxiety over what we imagine the outcome of events might be. To practice letting go or having faith is often the best we can do.

Deal with the stress after the fact. Finding positive ways to manage our stress may be our best alternative. Some examples of positive stress management are:

- Exercise
- Meditation or deep breathing
- Taking a walk outside
- Talking with a supportive friend, co-worker or family member
- Listening to music
- Taking a break

Stress is a significant part of life. By accepting this, we know we need to have ways of dealing with it that serve us and help us live well. Diabetes is a stressful part of your life, but you can find positive ways to manage it.