

Dontaie Allen's Journey To Kentucky Not A Surprise To Those Who Watched Him Play



by Larry Vaught

Dan McDonald got to see Pendleton County senior Dontaie Allen play three times at the Under Armour Challenge in Georgia in July and liked what he saw from the 6-6 wing player.

"I liked his size and body type," said McDonald, program coordinator for Lake Point Sports and a Rivals.com recruiting analyst. "He is a bigger, stronger — not heavy kid — but muscular kid. He's not great athlete but he can score from every level. He did everything in the games I saw. He handles the ball well and passes really well. He led the Under Armour event in scoring and was in the top five in rebounds and assists. That's pretty strong."

Allen averaged 26.4 points, 6.8 rebounds and 4.8 assists per game in the Under Armour Challenge playing for M.A.T.T.S. Mus-

tangs and had 30 points on 11-for-15 shooting, four rebounds and two assists in the game Kentucky coach John Calipari saw. He had 30 or more points three times in five games and even hit a game-winning shot when he had a double-double with 32 points and 10 rebounds.

That performance led to Calipari contacting Allen to set up a visit to UK that resulted in a scholarship offer last week and Allen, who grew up a Kentucky fan, said yes almost immediately to become UK's second commit — along with Texas guard Tyrese Maxey — in the 2019 recruiting class.

Marshall County Hoop Fest coordinator Dan Hudson knew Allen was a special player and contacted Pendleton County coach Keaton Belcher months ago about playing in this year's event. Pendleton will take on Marshall County — and point guard Zion Harmon, one of the nation's top sophomores — at 6 p.m. CST Dec. 1.

"People had been talking about him, so we did our research," Hudson said. "We try to bring in top kids to play here and when we invited them, we really felt like he was still under the radar. This summer he blew up

and you could tell he wanted to go to Kentucky. Sometimes this stuff just works out and we are really excited about the game.

"Marshall has a new coaching staff and a new attitude. The Marshall players are looking forward to playing in the spotlight in one of the event's prime time games and I personally think that will be one of the top games in the state of Kentucky until you get to the state tournament. This is one game I will definitely watch instead of running around doing all the other stuff I usually do."

Pendleton County coach Keaton Belcher never doubted Allen's talent and thought playing in Hoop Fest would be a good way to gain recognition across the state. Obviously, that's not needed now with his commitment to UK.

"When he announced he committed to Kentucky, it was a huge celebration in our county," Belcher said. "Everybody had been on pins and needles waiting to hear about the visit he took. His dream as a kid was to play at the University of Kentucky. His story is a great example of staying patient, being loyal and working hard to accomplish your dream. Kentucky

is not only getting a good basketball player. They are getting a good person."

Steve Quattrocchi, director of M.A.T.T.S. Mustangs, was not surprised that Allen got an offer from UK and then accepted it almost immediately.

"I knew he would likely end up there eventually," Quattrocchi said. "I'm very proud of Dontaie and thrilled he got to make his choice. Kentucky is his dream school and he is lucky enough to get to attend there and start chasing his dream to reach the next level after his time at Kentucky ends."

Quattrocchi hopes this might open doors for more Kentucky players to get to play at UK like Derek Willis and Dominique Hawkins did and like Allen will now.

"There are other kids in the state that are Kentucky caliber in future classes that will hopefully get that same opportunity," he said.

Benny Snell

Benny Snell reminds me a lot of former UK basketball standout Tyler Ulis when it comes to using skeptics as motivation to push himself to succeed.

Ulis was told for years that he was too little to play in high school and then college and then the NBA. Each time, he proved the skeptics wrong.

Snell was a three-star recruit from Westerville, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus. No surprise he was an Ohio State fan and wanted to be a "hometown" hero for the Buckeyes.

"I found myself at camps (in high school) being the best one, but other guys were getting MVPs and all that. From then until now, I have kept the chip on my shoulder and have continued to work hard," Snell said. "I'm always being downed and don't get enough credit, and teams are always getting put over Kentucky. That just keeps me motivated to go harder."

He was just the 56th-rated running back in the 2016 recruiting class but he rushed for 1,091 yards and 13 scores as a freshman and then added over 1,200 yards last season. The other four SEC running backs — Auburn's Kerryon Johnson, Georgia's Sony Michel and Nick Chubb, and LSU's Derrius Guice — who went over 1,200 yards are all now in the NFL.

Snell boldly said at SEC Media Days he was the best running back in the SEC. He's not backing down from that assertion despite being named to the all-SEC first team in pre-season voting by SEC media members.

"I always try to make myself as good as I can be off the field, whether it's film, practice or more reps. What separates myself from other running backs is that I am very durable. I can get 200-plus carries and still be fine for the rest of season," Snell said. "I broke my rib during a game last year, but I came in at halftime and ended up going back in, scored and finished the game and didn't miss any games."

"If it's a nagging injury, I'm in the training room and I'm going to get it fixed. If it's something to do with pain tolerance, I'm going to play through it. I'm playing through everything."

Intriguing Prospect

Kentucky freshman guard Ashton Hagans is an intriguing prospect for coach John Calipari this season because he reclassified to get into the 2018 recruiting class and he also has plenty of competition from Quade Green and Immanuel Quickley for playing time.

"Ashton did not rush to get to college to sit on the bench," said Sporting News college basketball columnist Mike DeCourcy. "He gives them a big presence in the backcourt. Immanuel is tall and lean and is very quick. He's listed at 6-3 and is close to that. You just don't see him as being 6-3 because he moves so quickly and darts around the court."

"But how many teams are going to have three high level, five-star point guards on the team. With the way basketball is now, the more guys you have that can attack the better off you are."

DeCourcy could envision Calipari playing all three together to close out games.

"If they can all make free throws under pressure like I think they can and John (Calipari) feels really good about that, having those three and the versatility it brings is really going to be a huge asset late in games," DeCourcy said.

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