

By JOHN HENSON  
Harlan County Sports.com

In their four seasons at Harlan County High School, Michael Smith and Jordy Brewer helped turn a new football program into a state contender.

They hope to have a similar impact at the University of Pikeville.

Kentucky coaching legend Dudley Hilton, who built Bell County and Breathitt County into mountain powerhouses and led both Bell and Bourbon County to state championships, made his first recruiting stop Wednesday morning at Harlan County High School to sign Brewer and Smith.

"We started here this year, then we're headed to Hazard and Pike County Central," Hilton said. "We're very excited about this class. Last year, we signed a lot of kids. Now our numbers are catching up. Being able to get a scholarship to the University of Pikeville is going to get harder and harder if we can keep our numbers there.

"I coached Bell County all those years and saw too many of them go away. They can't say the University of Pikeville don't give you a chance to play. Last year our quarterback was from Middlesboro, our tailback was from Middlesboro, our linebacker was from Bell County, our defensive back was from Perry Central. There are all kinds of mountain kids starting from the University of Pikeville. We'll put that up against anybody from the state of Kentucky."

Hilton, who completed his first season at Pikeville last fall with a 4-6 record, brought in two former Black Bears in his initial recruiting class — defensive end Jordan Calton and center Jesse Hensley.

Both Smith and Brewer say having former teammates at Pikeville will help their transition to college.

"Coach (Eddie) Creech said he wants mountain boys just as bad as he does Ohio and Georgia. At other schools, I felt since I was from Harlan they didn't view me as highly," Brewer said. "I like that it's close to home, and Jesse (Hensley) and Jordan (Calton) help a lot. I had an overnight visit there with them and felt right at home."



"I'm real excited about it," Smith said. "I feel the atmosphere is good there and I know some of the players who I played with in high school. I also like the coach. They've told me I'd like it, plus it's close to home."

Brewer and Smith played huge roles in the Bears' success, especially the two last seasons when Harlan County won District 8 titles in 5A. HCHS won the Region 4 title in 2010 before falling to Highlands in the state semifinals. The Bears rolled to a 9-1 record last season, then coasted past Pulaski County and Lincoln County in the first two rounds of the playoffs before falling in overtime in the regional finals at Southwestern. Harlan County posted a 38-13 record in its first four seasons.

"These two guys started with me my first year as freshmen," Harlan County coach Tom Larkey said. "This was our first full four-year squad. These two have been good students at the high school, good citizens of the community and good sons for their parents. They had a great attitude and set good examples for the young kids."

Brewer directed the HCHS offense the past two years at quarterback and was also a standout at safety. His leadership skills made him even more valuable to the Bears, according to Larkey.

"I never was worried about Jordy not being a leader," Larkey said. "He wasn't very vocal at first, but he has developed into a leader. He was a hard worker and stayed late a lot of days after practice. I can't remember these guys missing a practice or anything."

He completed 84 of 143 passes in his career for 1,423 yards with 13 touchdowns and six interceptions. He ran the ball 234 times for 1,430 yards and 27 touchdowns. Brewer may have been even better at safety with 12 interceptions, including two returned for touchdowns in addition to 99 tackles.

"Jordan is athlete. He makes things happen, and in this business you have to have people who make things happen," Hilton said. "A young man like that, there are so many things he can do. Some of our toughest guys at the University of Pikeville are small. He's been a quarterback, so he knows how to lead. That's what we're recruiting, and we think we have a dandy athlete in him. We let kids play where their heart is at, but it's good to have choices. Some kids don't have choices."

"They are recruiting Jordy as an athlete," Larkey said. "They will find a place for him to play, whether it's at defensive back or receiver or quarterback. I don't know the story on their quarterback situation. They'll fit Jordy in somewhere. He has great hands."

"I just want to play where I'm best for the team," Brewer said. "I just want to get on the field."

"It's pretty exciting. I know when I grabbed the pen to sign I about couldn't hold on to it. I've dreamed about this day for a long time. I'm really satisfied to have the opportunity to play at Pikeville."

Smith helped open holes for the Bears' potent ground attack at left tackle where he developed into one of the state's elite linemen. He had 172 pancake blocks in his career and added 72 tackles and five sacks at defensive tackle. Smith was a

first-team all-state selection last fall by the Courier-Journal and was a second-team selection on the Associated Press all-state team.

"He can move, and big men who can move are hard to find," Hilton said. "He's got a motor, and we're very excited. We feel he's one of the outstanding linemen, not only in eastern Kentucky, but in the state of Kentucky. We think we have a jewel in him."

"Michael came along a lot after his sophomore year," Larkey said. "He knew what he had to do to be a good player."

Hilton said his recruiting focus will remain on eastern Kentucky and he expects the Pikeville program to progress quickly, much like Bell County did when he arrived in the mid 1980s.

"I'm a freshman, and you learn a lot your freshman year," Hilton said. "I hope by the time I'm a senior I know how to do this business. It hasn't been easy, but I think my sophomore year will be a lot easier on me."

Both Smith and Brewer expect the winning tradition they helped establish continue at Harlan County High School. The Bears will likely be favored for their third straight district title next fall and will be among the state's top 5A teams in the preseason.

"I feel good about what we've done. We've come a long way," Smith said. "The underclassmen coming up better lead good."