

Akron Beacon Journal

East Dragons football has become a beacon for Division I college football programs

Brad Bournival Akron Beacon Journal

Published 5:45 a.m. ET April 13, 2023

Key Points

Coach Marques Hayes has turned East football from a 24-man team into a squad college coaches yearn to have.

Five current East athletes hold Division I college scholarship offers.

East's trend of sending athletes to play college football is building momentum.

There's a high school football powerhouse in Akron churning out Division I athletes, but it's not who you think.

The school has been filling college rosters for a decade, and if this recruiting cycle is any indication, the East Dragons aren't about to stop.

“This is the stuff we used to talk about when we were little,” East running back Ziaire Stevens said. “It was playing at the next level and going to our dream colleges. We still talk about it like, ‘Oh, yeah, bro? What if we play against each other at the next level? I can't wait to play against you. What if we play on the same team?’

“It's exciting. Since you were a kid, this is what you wanted to do. My dream is coming true, and a lot of other players' dreams are, too.”

College football recruiting: Here's a look at the top 20 recruited Greater Akron/Canton high school football players

East Dragons football: Team rounding into form with Ziaire Stevens, Justin Cox leading the way

Stevens is one of five current players being recruited. The sophomore has offers from Akron, Ball State, Boston College, Bowling Green, Cincinnati, Eastern Kentucky, Indiana, Kent State, Massachusetts, Pittsburgh, Toledo, Miami (Ohio) and Central Michigan.

Quarterback Ibraheem Kamara has offers as an athlete to go to Ball State, Bowling Green, Eastern Michigan, Kent State, Marshall, Miami, Central Michigan, Toledo, Ohio, Massachusetts, Liberty and Pittsburgh. He committed to the Rockets last week.

Running back/free safety Debo Mitchell has offers from Miami (Ohio), Massachusetts and Central Michigan and wide receiver Luther Darisaw has an offer from the RedHawks as well. Edge rusher Armani Holloway has an offer from Massachusetts.

“It shows you can go to your hometown school,” East coach Marques Hayes said. “You can get the same type of recruitment and exposure that you would get at a parochial school or schools that have more resources.”

East football means college scholarship opportunities under Marques Hayes

Hayes has been instrumental in the process. In his 11 seasons he has taken a team with 24 players and created a program with 65 individuals.

It started in the 2016 season with DeAndre Brimage, Jemarulin Suggs and Marquess Callaway committing to Akron.

A year later Devanier Floyd, Ramon Fields and Daishawn Brimage committed to the Zips.

Fast forward to today and you'll find Bangally Kamara starring at linebacker for Pitt and Deshawn Jones Jr. leading Bowling Green in interceptions last season.

“College coaches know what they're getting,” Hayes said. “They know we're putting out a pretty good product and coaching guys the right way. We're doing everything we can to make sure they're college ready.”

Next wave of East recruits expect success with the Dragons

That's not lost on Ibraheem Kamara, who has seen his brother go through the recruiting process and now is watching his teammates enjoy the ride along with him.

“Everything we do is about competing,” he said. “We compete in the weight room. We compete on the field. We compete everywhere. It's very intense. We just want to be better.”

That next chance comes May 9 when East has its own combine for college coaches at Ellet High School.

“We're getting guys into college, but we're not just promoting college football just because we want to see guys go play college football,” Hayes said. “They're providing you a scholarship, which is going to pay for your schooling and things like that. You get to pick whatever degree that you want to be in that you want to see your career go, and then in return you also get to play some football.

“You play it four or five more years and then you have your college education paid for.”

Contact Brad Bournival at bbournival@gannett.com and follow him on Twitter at [@bbournival](https://twitter.com/bbournival)