

UK commit Brady Hull built quick relationship with Cutter Leftwich



Larry Vaught
Contributing Writer

Pulaski County offensive lineman Brady Hull had built a relationship with former Kentucky coach Mark Stoops and his staff before Stoops was fired after the 2025 season. When coach Will Stein got to Kentucky, the Pulaski junior had no prior relationships with him or anyone on the new UK coaching staff.

"I had not heard any of their names. Honestly, I didn't even really know coach Stein (who had been offensive coordinator at Oregon)," Hull said.

However, Stein and new UK offensive line coach Cutter Leftwich wasted no time reaching out to Hull and visiting him even while they were trying to put together a 2026 roster. That led to Hull becoming Stein's first 2027 commit.

"It was insane. It was three or four hours after coach Leftwich got hired and he called me. He told me how much of a priority I was for them and that meant a lot to me," Hull said. "The dude was barely hired and he was calling me. A couple of weeks later, coach Stein comes down (to Somerset) for a visit. That told me that they really wanted me."

Leftwich, Oregon's assistant offensive line coach last year, is only 27 years old. Hull likes everything about him.

"He's a really young guy, and he's really relatable. I can always go to him if I ever need things. He's got great energy and he's a heck of a coach," Hull said. "I love the way he coaches, and I just love the vision he had for me on and off the field. He takes care of my family. He's always checking up on them. Everybody says it's just about football and all that but it's not just about football. You have got to have relationships outside football, and football is always going to go away someday. So you got to have those relationships."

Pulaski coach Travis Burns said Leftwich quickly built a relationship with Hull almost instantly.

"Relationships matter to

these kids. He would come down and see him and they had a plan for Brady. He showed him how they could develop him and you could see they had put a lot of thought into it," Burns said.

Hull liked how Leftwich broke down plays with him

"Obviously I have to give thanks to the Lord for my athletic ability. He is definitely my number one go-to when I give thanks," Hull said. "He blessed me with my footwork. Obviously I work on that footwork. Everything I can do is God-given."

Living in Louisville and then Somerset, Hull grew up a Kentucky fan and says UK has always been his "dream school" for as long as he can remember.

"When you grow up in Kentucky, you always want to play for your home state, and that's always the dream for a Kentucky kid. I've always been a Kentucky fan," Hull



Photo Submitted
Kentucky coach Will Stein quickly let Brady Hull and his family know that the Pulaski County lineman was a priority recruit for UK.

along with expectations for his move to center at the collegiate level.

"He's like a breath of fresh air with the way he relates and talks to you," the 6-foot-3, 295-pound Hull, the Class 5A lineman of the year in 2025, said.

Burns understands why Stein and Leftwich liked Hull immediately.

"He might not be as big as some linemen but he is very athletic," the Pulaski coach said. "The previous coach at South Carolina told me he tested better than any lineman at their camp. He's a huge competitor who is not afraid of work. He's in the weight room every day. He moves very well for his size. He will translate to center at the next level very well and possibly even guard."

Hull considers himself lucky to be blessed with the athleticism he has.

said.

He said his mom "worried a little bit" about his recruitment and quick commitment but he told her that Stein and his staff "believed" in him but he also "believed" in them.

"You just feel it in your heart. You just know it. When you're ready, you're ready. I was ready and so excited to commit," Hull said.

He didn't have an announcement ceremony. Instead, he just announced his college choice on social media rather doing it in front of TV cameras, media, friends and family

"He is a get to work type of guy. He is not about making a flash. That's not who he is," Burns said.

"At first I did think about a commitment ceremony but something just told me not to do it that way. I don't know if

it was God or something, but that's just not me. I just wanted to go ahead and get it over with. I wanted to be coach Stein's first commitment (in the 2027 recruiting class) and start recruiting other people to come join me in the Big Blue Wall."

Could Kentucky freshman Malachi Moreno be a one-and-done player with his stock rising with NBA scouts because of his recent play?

NBADraftroom.com calls Moreno a "fast rising center prospect who looks the part of a future NBA draft pick with first round potential" in the 2026 or 2027 draft. The site praises his "solid frame, coordination, strength, timing as a shot blocker, and length" while noting he is not the most explosive player.

Respected NBA draft analyst Matt Babcock believes Moreno already checks a lot of NBA boxes for a big man. "Although he has some limitations, his size and mobility allow him to be effective, especially on the defensive end. Adding strength and continuing to develop offensively will be key. He's a prospect to continue monitoring," Babcock posted on babcockhoops.com.

Krysten Peek, a NBA.com contributor and analyst, has not heard a lot of buzz about the 7-foot Moreno among NBA executives and scouts.

"I think his best path will be testing the NBA draft waters, getting feedback about his game and coming back to college to help his draft status in a weaker (draft) class (in 2027)," Peek said. "The guaranteed money stops at the beginning of the second round. If you are drafted anywhere from 33 to 60, you are probably going to sign a two-way contract and fight for a roster spot and only make \$500,000 in the G League."

"You are seeing more players return to college because they can make more NIL money than they can in the G League. That is making college basketball older and mak-

ing NBA play better because the plug and play players are all older."

Peek doesn't think one-and-done players will go away because the "NBA will always bet on youth and upside" for elite players.

"But the value for more experienced players is always way better now," Peek said.

Peek believes the best thing that happened to Moreno was not making the USA U19 team that won a gold medal last summer.

"He went back to campus with a chip on shoulder and ready to go to work," she said. "It's exactly what we have seen with Chris Cenac at Houston. Sometimes players going through adversity is the best thing ever for them."

ESPN analyst Jimmy Dykes liked that Moreno leads all SEC freshman in offensive rebounds but also knows he has work to do to play in the NBA.

"He needs an offseason to work on his outside shot to get ready for the next level," Dykes said.

Peek understands that Moreno - who had 11 points and 11 rebounds in UK's loss at Florida - has benefitted from projected first-round draft pick Jayden Quaintance being out for all but four games this season as he recovers from a knee injury suffered last season.

"It was the next man up philosophy and Malachi took advantage of his opportunity," Peek said. "Jayden will still be a first-round pick (in the 2026 NBA Draft) because of his upside. We have seen glimpses of it."

"He just has a special skill set. He can put the ball on the ground and NBA executives believe his skill set translates well to the NBA. He may not play immediately but he's young and talented with such a high upside that he will be a first round pick." ** *

Junior infielder Ethan Hindle of Wisconsin played in just 25 games - with 22 starts - last season before suffering a foot injury that ended his

sophomore season when he knocked in 15 runs, scored 18 runs, walked 13 times and got hit by a pitch 19 times to fit in perfectly with the way coach Nick Mingione likes to play. He also had a game-tying ninth inning homer in a win over Texas.

Hindle believes he has learned what it takes to be a good SEC baseball player.

"A guy with a lot of resilience, grit. The games are hard. It takes one pitch or it takes one event to happen," Hindle said. "You have to stay super focused and super locked in, and you have to be a guy that once you pull away with that lead, you have to keep going and put your foot down."

Perhaps the biggest change in Kentucky's team this season is having a much more experienced pitching staff. However, Hindle said that is not the only difference.

"The looseness and the grit that we'll play with," he said. "We're a very close team, but we're all very similar in that we have a lot of guys who are very tough, very talented and they love baseball. Guys like having fun together but also playing super hard."

Mingione wants Hindle to work more on "hitting my pitch" and being more consistent doing that.

"I was kind of inconsistent in everything I do. So I brought that (being consistent) into my habits daily, and it's translated to the baseball field," Hindle said.

He's also learned from watching shortstop Tyler Bell, one of the nation's best players and a preseason All-American.

"He's a guy that while he's working hard, he's not just there for himself. He's a very selfless guy. He's always texting other guys trying to bring them along and help them get better, too," Hindle said. "There's no doubt in my mind that other guys are better just because of his work ethic and the example that he has shown. He's so humble. He's all about us, all about the team."

Maroons

game, 27-24.

Mercer battled back in the second quarter, outscoring the Maroons 15-9. The Titans left some points on the board in the first half, missing five free throws, and Pulaski's defense forced multiple turnovers that helped them build a lead.

The Titans started the third quarter with a putback from Frisby and took the lead off a layup from Releford, 28-27. Pulaski attacked the paint and scored twice, and on the other end, Wilham drove baseline for a layup, 31-30. The Maroons scored off a steal, and Baker was fouled in the paint and made both of her free throws, 33-32. The third quarter ended with Frisby finding Carlton in the paint for a layup to take a one-point lead headed into the fourth quarter, 34-33.

The fourth quarter started with Releford picking up her fourth foul and the Maroons tying the game at the free-throw line, 34-34. Frisby made a midrange shot, but Pulaski answered with a corner three, 36-37. Another Mercer foul gave the Maroons two free throws, and they scored a layup off a steal, 40-36. Carlton picked up her fourth foul, and Pulaski started to pull away with another 3-pointer, 44-36.

Titans head Coach Chris Souder called a timeout with Pulaski's second unit leading the late scoring surge. Out of the timeout, Releford scored a layup, and Baker had a putback at the rim, 47-40. Releford fouled out in the last



The Harrodsburg Herald/Wesley Bird Junior Izzie Carlton scored over the Maroons defense in the Titans loss to Pulaski County Monday, Feb. 16.

two minutes, and the Maroons made both free throws and followed it up with a 3-pointer, 52-40. Wilham had Mercer's final three points with a backdoor cut and layup and one free throw. Baker fouled out as well in the final minute, and Pulaski's last point came from the charity stripe, 43-53.

The Maroons took over in the fourth quarter, scoring

20 points and making four threes. The Titans fought hard against the second-best team in the 12th region and had three players score in the double digits, including Carlton, Frisby and Wilham.

Mercer's final regular season game is Thursday, Feb. 19, at Southwestern at 7:30 p.m. The 46th District tournament will be next week.

from 1B



ALLISON BALL AUDITOR OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Independent Auditor's Report

The Honorable Sarah Steele, Mercer County Judge/Executive
The Honorable Ernie Keltz, Mercer County Sheriff
Members of the Mercer County Fiscal Court

Report on the Audit of the Financial Statement

Opinions

We have audited the accompanying Statement of Receipts, Disbursements, and Excess Fees - Regulatory Basis of the Sheriff of Mercer County, Kentucky, for the year ended December 31, 2024, and the related notes to the financial statement.

Unmodified Opinion on Regulatory Basis of Accounting

In our opinion, the accompanying financial statement presents fairly, in all material respects, the receipts, disbursements, and excess fees of the Mercer County Sheriff for the year ended December 31, 2024, in accordance with the basis of accounting practices prescribed or permitted by the Commonwealth of Kentucky to demonstrate compliance with the Commonwealth of Kentucky's regulatory basis of accounting and budget laws as described in Note 1.

Adverse Opinion on U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

In our opinion, because of the significance of the matter discussed in the Basis for Adverse Opinion on U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles section of our report, the financial statement does not present fairly, in accordance with accounting principle generally accepted in the United States of America, the financial position of the Mercer County Sheriff, as of December 31, 2024, or changes in financial position or cash flows thereof for the year then ended.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America (GAAS), the standard applicable to financial audits contained in *Government Auditing Standards* (GAS), issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, and the *Audit Program for County Fee Officials* issued by the Auditor of Public Accounts, Commonwealth of Kentucky. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statement section of our report. We are required to be independent of the Mercer County Sheriff and to meet our other ethical responsibilities, in accordance with the relevant ethical requirements relating to our audit. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinions.

Basis for Adverse Opinion on U.S. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

As described in Note 1 of the financial statement, the financial statement is prepared by the Mercer County Sheriff on the basis of the accounting practices prescribed or permitted by the laws of Kentucky, to demonstrate compliance with the Commonwealth of Kentucky's regulatory basis of accounting and budget laws, which is a basis of accounting other than accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America. The effects on the financial statement of the variances between the regulatory basis of accounting described in Note 1 and accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America, although not reasonably determinable, are presumed to be material and pervasive.

Responsibilities of Management for the Financial Statement

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of this financial statement in accordance with accounting practice prescribed or permitted by the laws of Kentucky to demonstrate compliance with the Commonwealth of Kentucky's regulatory basis of accounting and budget laws. Management is also responsible for the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of a financial statement that is free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is required to evaluate whether there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Mercer County Sheriff's ability to continue as a going concern for twelve months beyond the financial statement date, including any currently known information that may raise substantial doubt shortly thereafter.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statement

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statement as a whole is free from material misstatement whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinions. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not absolute assurance and, therefore, is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with GAAS and GAS will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal controls. Misstatements are considered material if there is a substantial likelihood that, individually or in the aggregate, they would influence the judgment made by a reasonable user based on the financial statement.

In performing an audit in accordance with GAAS and GAS, we:

- Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statement, whether due to fraud or error, and design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks. Such procedures include examining, on a test basis, evidence regarding the amounts and disclosures in the financial statement.
- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the Mercer County Sheriff's internal control. Accordingly, no such opinion is expressed.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluate the overall presentation of the financial statement.
- Conclude whether, in our judgment, there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about the Mercer County Sheriff's ability to continue as a going concern for a reasonable period of time.

We are required to communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit, significant audit findings, and certain internal control-related matters that we have identified during the audit.

Other Reporting Required by Government Auditing Standards

In accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*, we have also issued our report dated October 17, 2025, on our consideration of the Mercer County Sheriff's internal control over financial reporting and on our tests of its compliance with certain provisions of laws, regulations, contracts, grant agreements, and other matters. The purpose of that report is solely to describe the scope of our testing of internal control over financial reporting and compliance and the results of that testing, and not to provide an opinion on the effectiveness of internal control over financial reporting or on compliance. That report is an integral part of an audit performed in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*, in considering the Mercer County Sheriff's internal control over financial reporting and compliance.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison Ball
Allison Ball
Auditor of Public Accounts
Frankfort, KY