

Fortt, Redd earn MVP honors at Top Gun Camp

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STAMFORD -- Khairi Fortt and Silas Redd made a pact at the start of the summer: to go to no more than one football camp before the high school season started.

That agreement was broken barely after it was made, and the two seniors demonstrated last week that their extra work has paid off.

In a coup for a state that is a mere blip on the national football stage, Fortt, a senior linebacker for Stamford High School, and Redd, a senior running back and defensive back at King, were respectively named the defensive and offensive most valuable players at the Football University Top Gun Camp in Paisley, Fla.

"I was actually very surprised," said the 6-foot-3, 225-pound Fortt, who in perhaps bigger news announced that he had narrowed his list of college choices down to six. "I knew I was doing much better with my footwork and keeping up with running backs. When they announced Silas as offensive MVP, I was like, 'OK, Connecticut.' When they announced me as the defensive MVP, I was like, 'Oh, shoot.' "

Redd, who is 5-10 and 187 pounds, rushed for 1,350 yards and 13 touchdowns to help lead King to a 9-1 record last season. He committed to attending Penn State in May.

"This honor means a lot," said Redd, who lives in Norwalk. "You go into these things trying to play at a high level, with intensity, to the best of my ability. Leave it all on the field and try to perform with the best athletes there. Khairi and I are trying to help put Connecticut on the map as a football state."

Top Gun is considered one of the more prestigious camps in the country, and attracted a number of top prospects from Florida, a football hotbed.

"These two athletes worked very hard and did not skip a beat," Vin Siciliano, the head coach at Top Gun, said via e-mail. "Khairi and Silas showed me that they were here to work and get better, and determined to be the best that they can be. They have a great future ahead of them."

Fortt and Redd received rave reviews in an e-mail from John Schmid, the director of player personnel for the U.S. Army All-American Bowl, who attended Top Gun to evaluate talent.

"He performed as advertised," Schmid said of Fortt. "He has all the physical skills to play linebacker. He showed tremendous speed, agility and quickness. Khairi projects to be an outstanding college linebacker."

Schmid said of Redd: "This was my first time seeing Silas perform in person. I knew he was a good football player, but he blew away my expectations. Athletically he can compete with any recruit in the country. He is versatile, and I can see him excelling as a running back or defensive back in college. Although he is considered a major recruit, I feel he is a grossly underrated prospect."

Redd said the honor, at the last of the five camps he has attended since May, has great meaning.

"I wasn't surprised necessarily, but I was humbled and grateful," Redd said. "I have confidence in myself and it was good to show what I can do."

In perhaps news of greater significance, Fortt disclosed that the sweepstakes for his services is reaching the homestretch and a final decision may be forthcoming sooner than expected.

Fortt has pared his college choice down to six finalists: Penn State, Georgia, USC, Michigan, Tennessee and North Carolina.

"I've seen my rivals, and everyone else has narrowed down their list and I was the only person who didn't," Fortt explained. "Schools want a verdict. By narrowing it down I can get some schools off my shoulders."

Many have assumed that Fortt will end up joining Redd, one of his closest friends, at Penn State. But Fortt had a great visit at Georgia last month and he said right now a choice between the two would be difficult.

"They are definitely in the lead right now," Fortt said. "I have a lot of family 30 minutes away from Georgia and I loved everything."

Fortt is on schedule to graduate from Stamford in January and then would be eligible to head to the school he chooses to get a head start. Fortt said he would definitely take official visits to both Penn State and Georgia. Since the Black Knights open the season on Thursday, Sept. 17, against Stamford, Fortt said he would probably use that weekend to make one trip.

Fortt said he was uncertain whether he would travel to the other four schools, and said he hoped a final decision would be made by the end of next month.

"I'm not really sure when it will be but it can't be too late," he said. "It can't be October or November."

Redd said he is looking forward to working out on his own and relaxing a little before King's preseason practices begin.

"I'm going to focus on getting ready for the season," he said. "I definitely want to have some fun, but not too much fun. It has been all work and no play much of the summer."

Since Connecticut does not produce a large number of Division I players, Fortt and Redd said they were proud to help bring some recognition to the state.

"People kind of still hate on us, saying we don't have the players or don't play anyone," Fortt said. "It's funny that Silas and I agreed on no camps and then this happened. I'm glad we ended up breaking our rules."