

Goal

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mostly on defense. After his first season on the gridiron, BHS track coach Bob Beekman noticed Ekpo's blazing speed and recruited him to join the track team.

"I realized I was moreso a track guy playing football," Ekpo said. "I didn't like to get hit. I didn't like the contact."

As a junior, he ran an 11.5 in the 100 (about a second off this past season's state championship time) and was a Division I district champ.

"I was like wow, I could actually be pretty good in this sport," he said.

As a senior, Ekpo was undefeated until the state meet, where he finished eighth, and set a school record with a 10.74 in the 100. He also made it in the 200, finishing ninth.

Now he's thinking college. But recruiting for track and field is quite different than many others because it's a spring sport. And as a late bloomer, Ekpo was somewhat of an unknown to most colleges.

"It very much put me at a disadvantage," he said. "I was starting to peak when most of these kids had their offers and they were already committed to go to schools. I didn't know what I was going to do."

Not long after that, Ekpo was watching the NCAA national championships on ESPN and was captivated with the wind-aided 9.89 TCU's Charles Silmon ran. Ekpo "cold-called" Coach Darryl Anderson, who happened to be in Columbus the week prior to Ekpo's state meet appearance.

"He recognized my last name," Ekpo said. "A week later my mom and I were on a flight to Dallas."

Ekpo first attended Central State University — where his father, Nseabasi, was the director of student support services — for three semesters before transferring to TCU in the spring of 2015. While at CSU, Ekpo wasn't able to train like a track athlete and it showed when he arrive in Fort Worth.

"It was humbling," Ekpo said with a laugh, calling Big 12 track a "different animal."

He had some nagging injuries, checked in at 195 pounds, and didn't have a fantastic freshman

season.

"I was like, man, I'm a regional champion. Now I'm at the bottom of the pack," Ekpo said. "I was like the overlooked guy that no one thought about. Couldn't stay healthy. That was the hardest climb."

But he made it to the peak.

Back home for the summer, he trained for five hours daily with Beekman at Premier Health in Englewood. He lost 12 pounds and was, as they say, ripped when he got back to campus.

"I was just ready to go," he said.

Ekpo ran a 6.85 in the 60, second only to Tokyo Olympian Ronnie Baker. During his junior year Ekpo helped the Horned Frogs finish ninth in the NCAA in the 400 relay. After the NCAA meet in Oregon, Ekpo was experiencing hip pain. His local trainer/physical therapist Brett Hoffman suspected a torn hip labrum. Ekpo monitored it during the summer and as pain increased, an August MRI confirmed a torn labrum. Ekpo had Olympic aspirations, where he wanted to represent his father's home country of Nigeria.

"That kind of derailed my plans," he said.

They decided on a conservative treatment, involving injections and no surgery. He participated in 22 meets and his last meet in Waco, Texas he ran the 100 in 10.6. A week later he had arthroscopic surgery.

A chance meeting

Upon his initial arrival to campus in Fort Worth, Ekpo was chatting with someone who had asked where he was from.

"This lady comes out of her office, she was like Beavercreek, Ohio?" Ekpo said. The lady was Jamie Dulle, a Wright State grad who was great friends with Tornichio.

"She was a very close advisor to me throughout college," Ekpo said. "When I was thinking about law school in 2016 or 17, she was like, 'You have to go meet Judge Tornichio.'"

Ekpo met Tornichio that summer. A couple years later, Ekpo and Tornichio reconnected. Unfortunately, it was at Dulle's funeral. She had died after being hit by a drunk driver in Texas in March 2019. Later that year, Tornichio — then the juvenile court judge — hired Ekpo as a part-time clerk in the court.

Ekpo also worked part time as a detention counselor and took on that role full time when Tornichio won election to the general division since it could be a conflict of interest to be a clerk in the same court where inmates he interacts with at the detention center were tried.

Most law students clerk after completing the three-year program. Ekpo was one of the lucky ones to get a clerkship before.

"He believed in me," Ekpo said of Tornichio. "He was like, 'You're going to be on the Supreme Court one day.' I could talk forever about Judge Tornichio."

Never give up

Written on a mirror in his home are virtues by which Ekpo likes to live.

Discipline. Consistency. Sense of purpose. Those five words describe how he attacked the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT).

Ekpo managed to work two jobs and study when he wasn't working. He tackled any hurdle (track pun intended) in his way and never gave up, staying focused on what he needed in order to succeed — discipline.

Ekpo kept doing it day after day after day, always striving to be the best — consistency.

The 25-year-old was going to law school, somewhere, no matter what — sense of purpose.

"With those three things, anything is possible," Ekpo said. "I never get defeated."

Ekpo clerked from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Worked from 2-6 p.m. at the detention center and then studied until midnight.

He did that for 18 months.

At first, Ekpo's mother, Judith, thought she was being duped when he said he was going to study.

"I said I wasn't born yesterday," Judith said. "He's not studying on a Friday night. He's hanging out with his friends."

But as the house began to fill up with any and every book pertaining to law, she was a believer.

"I've got books coming out the wall," she said. "Once Dekan puts his mind to something, he does follow through with it."

He scored a 158 on his first LSAT attempt, which was in the 72nd percentile.

"Most people wouldn't retake a 158," Ekpo said.

But he's not most people.

"That drive, I knew I could do better," he said.

And he did. He scored a 166 in October 2020 which placed him in the 93rd percentile.

Many choices

Ekpo applied to 23 law schools, spending around \$1,000 on application fees. With his LSAT performance he was thinking big.

"Once I got that score, I knew I was going to go to a good law school," he said. "That was a huge sigh of relief."

It was a competitive cycle because COVID increased the number of law school applicants, Ekpo said.

Baylor was the first to offer a spot, and gave him a full scholarship to attend. Ironically, his sister, Idongesit, went to rival SMU. Pepperdine followed with a full ride. Other offers — with scholarships — came. In addition, he was wait-listed at Virginia, Georgetown, Michigan, Northwestern, and Vanderbilt.

In February, a letter from South Bend came, offering him a Dean's Scholarship of \$100,000, which would cover the first year of law school there and leave some extra. He paid a \$1,000 seat deposit to secure his spot.

In May, Ekpo visited Michigan and Notre Dame and fell in love with both towns. He was settling on Notre Dame but then a couple weeks ago, Ekpo gained acceptance into Michigan. But despite seeing what other law schools offered scholarship-wise, the folks in Ann Arbor did not offer him one penny. That was a big deal.

Ekpo sat down with his mom, consulted Juvenile Court Judge Amy Lewis and other mentors and was all-in on Notre Dame.

"It was stressful," Ekpo said. "I took some time off work."

But he is at peace with his decision.

"Notre Dame was a great school," he said, quickly adding that Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett is a Notre Dame Law School grad.

And if you ask Tornichio, Ekpo could be the second.

"I think he's going to be a great attorney," Tornichio said.

Tornichio knew that the first time he met Ekpo.

Contact Scott Halasz at 937-502-4507.



Darryl McGee | Greene County News
Greene County Commissioner Dick Gould awaits the beginning of the public hearing.

Levy

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concerns is for the workers who have to deal with the current conditions of both the jail and sheriff's department office.

"Those who provide for the care and custody of the people given to the sheriff's department are the unsung heroes," Keller said. "Those workers need adequate facilities to do their jobs."

An estimate of up to 40 percent of sales tax comes from visitors that live outside Greene County, according to county records.

"I don't feel like Greene County residents should pay this entire bill," Major Shawn Prall said. "The sales tax is the way to do that."

Greene County resident Kathryn LeVesconte said she is in favor of the project.

"We support the decommission of the downtown jail," LeVesconte said. "The sheriff should not have

to be in a 1929 car dealership facility."

Xenia resident Janis James said the need is there, but there are additional issues.

"I am asking you to study what you are getting," she said. "There is a need for a new jail. However, a shiny new facility will not solve all of the problems. Explain to us what will be done to help people. Before you put the levy on a ballot, this is your chance to leave a legacy."

Bellbrook resident Wendy Dyer expressed concerns about miscommunication.

"I have had discussions with people on both sides of the issue. There has been a lot of miscommunication," Dyer said. "Before the issue is placed on a ballot, we need to let the public know what we are going to do."

Other residents also spoke about making sure the mental-health aspect is addressed so inmates aren't repeat offenders.

Reach Darryl McGee at 937-502-4534

Soin

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provide. We want to provide the best outcome for each patient individually."

Earning such ratings was not a shock to Farkash.

"It's not surprise considering the quality of service our caregivers provide each day," he said.

Farkash said that ratings are a reflection of completed patient experience surveys.

The kidney failure recognition has a lot to do with Soin's intensive care team, according to Farkash.

"That rating is heavily

focused on that team, the nursing team, and the team of specialists," he said. "We are proud to provide the services we provide right here in Greene County."

In healthcare, Farkash said the year has been challenging dealing with COVID. Therefore, receiving any recognition feels good to the staff of Soin.

Receiving recognition for its services is nothing new to Soin. Along with this latest recognition, Soin received recognition back in the spring. At the time, for the fifth time, SMC received a rating of "A" by the Leapfrog Group Hospital Safety Grade.

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