

Atlanta-area stud has Cardinal interest

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LB James Vaughters

The United States was colonized from East to West, but don't tell that to the Stanford coaching staff. The Cardinal are -- yet again -- in pursuit of a high-profile prospect from metro-Atlanta, this one a 2011 linebacker. Who in the 404 seems on track to be a five-star recruit at a position of acute need with Stanford interest?

James Vaughters is just a junior, but don't tell that to college recruiters. The inside linebacker from Tucker, Georgia, a suburb 20 minutes northeast of Atlanta, sports an offer list 17 schools long that would make any high school senior blush. Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Miami, Ohio State, USC and, of course, Stanford, are among the schools that have already offered the 6-foot-2, 215-pound prospect. Obviously, there's no such thing as a can't-miss high school junior, but if there were, many coaches would be placing their bets on James Vaughters.

"At this point, we haven't ruled anything out," said Jonathan Vaughters, James' father. "We're keeping an open mind, seeing what comes in and focusing on the football season. He's wide-open right now, at least open outwardly. He may be developing a point of view in his head."

Given the potentially overwhelming amount of interest the recruiting world has in James Vaughters, it's Jonathan, his father, who handles interviews with reporters. Mr. Vaughters' interest in his son and his recruitment doesn't stop there, however. A consultant with Cox Enterprises, a major media company in the area, and a UNC graduate to boot, Jonathan Vaughters knows full well the value of a strong education, and is not shy in sharing his views with his son. "I've got some ideas, places I'm at least strongly suggesting he entertain, primarily because as his father, I'm really looking for a school with a lot of balance," Mr. Vaughters said. "By balance, I mean the balance between the athletics, and clearly the football program, but also the academics. Is there a good student body, a good environment, a place where he may want to live when he's done with school and football?"

The senior Vaughters can think of several schools which immediately jump out to him.

"I've got a couple of favorites," he said. "I'm actually a UNC graduate, so I kind of inject them into the mix. I grew up as an Ohio State fan and inject them into the mix. We've been here in Georgia, so I inject Georgia and Georgia Tech into the mix. For a variety of reasons, different schools are in the mix. I have always admired Stanford, not only because of their academics, but also because they're always near the top in the Directors' Cup. That means something -- that means the entire University embraces athletics as well as academics, as an important part of the student experience.

"There are a couple of others. USC is obviously a top-notch program with great academics. It's southern California, which is a long way away for his mom [who runs a personal training company] and I, but it's something he's entertaining. He is coast-to-coast at this point."

Indeed, given Vaughters' high profile, his choice of college destination will not at all be limited by distance, as he already has received offers not just from the local schools, but across the country. Distance thus becomes a larger question for the Vaughters family than it does for most recruits, which Mr. Vaughters readily acknowledges.

"For us, it's a consideration," he said. "It's not an exclusive factor; it's not a limiting factor. Obviously, it would make it a lot tougher to travel to the West Coast, for example, but if that's really something James finds is the best fit for him, we'll be supportive. It's certainly a factor and part of the decision-making criteria, but it's not a constraint." For now, James Vaughters is mere hours away from one of the biggest games of his season, as his 7-1 Tucker Tigers take on an 8-0 Southwest DeKalb Panther squad stocked with D-I prospects. (The Tigers, defending 4A state champions certainly take their football seriously, as perhaps the most comprehensive website in the history of high school football evidences.)

"They're playing for regional bragging rights," Jonathan Vaughters said. "So far, the season has gone really well. James had an injury two games in, but has come back and played the balance of season, primarily at linebacker, where all the colleges have him designed to line up. He played last year at defensive end, which is a new position for him. He embraced it and played it well, and has now transferred back to linebacker, where he played since Pee Wee."

Extra Points

Two final items of note for Stanford fans. First, a quote that is music to the ears:

"I'm proud to report James is a 4.0 student," his father said.

Second, as reported here at The Bootleg and elsewhere, James Vaughters will be attending the Stanford at USC game this November. The Vaughters hope to have the opportunity to meet with Coach Harbaugh there, as there interaction with the Stanford staff to-date has primarily been with assistant Willie Taggart.