Virginia Tech, getting a late start in state football recruiting wars because of its coaching transition, had a banner day Monday as it signed four prospects, including highly-sought Larry Bethea of Ferguson High in Newport News.

In addition to Bethea, Tech nabbed running back Rocco Coles of Bayshar High in Virginia Beach, defensive back Rick Harman of Patrick Henry, and tackle Leonard Walker of Petersburg.

Bethea was definitely the top catch. The 6-5, 235-pounder was the object of a massive recruiting battle which included Alabama, Notre Dame, Michigan State, Penn State and North Carolina State.

It was the first definite blue-chip prospect signed by any of the Big Five schools. The rest of the lot have went the out-of-state route.

Bethea was swamped with honors after a sparkling senior year. In addition to making All-State, All Eastern Region and All-Peninsula in Virginia, he also won selection to the All-Southern team of the Orlando (Fla.) Sentinel Star, and All-America teams picked by Parade Magazine and Coach and Athlete Magazine.

Coach Jimmy Sharpe and assistant Charlie Pell were both on hand to sign Bethea. In fact, Pell has practically lived in the Norfolk area since taking his post at Tech where he has been on the recruiting trail.

“We’re thrilled Larry decided to come to Virginia Tech,” said Sharpe. “We feel it’s a vote of confidence for Virginia Tech.”

“I chose Virginia Tech because it is the best in-state school,” was Bethea’s remark. “One of the main reasons I decided to stay in the state was because I didn’t find anything out of state that pleased me.”

Coles is a 5-10, 170-pounder who also selected Tech over a number of schools. The second-team all-stater had offers from North Carolina, South Carolina, Kansas State, Michigan State, Temple, Louisville and The Citadel.

He rushed 167 times for 1,158 yards last season, scoring 15 touchdowns as the Marlins produced their best record ever, 8-2.

Harman, a 5-11, 178-pound all-state defensive back, signed Monday night. He was selected to the All-Bosomoke Valley District team as well as the All-Timesland squad.

He also played offensive end for the Patriots who won the State AAA football title.

Walker is 6-4, 240. He made the Tri-City team as a defensive tackle as well as all-district honors for Petersburg. He played both ways and received numerous college offers.

The four signings bring Tech’s total scholarship number to 15, which is way below most of the other schools who are approaching the 30-limit.

But that can be attributed to the fact that the Gobblers got a very late start as valuable time was lost when looking for a successor to a resigning Charlie Coffey.