

## BK's Thoughts On Signing Day

Written by Sean Stires

Wednesday, 06 February 2013 14:45

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NOTRE DAME, Ind. - It's all about the future - that is how Notre Dame head coach Brian Kelly best summed-up national signing day 2013. Kelly greeted the media Wednesday afternoon to discuss the 22 players that had sent him their signed national letters of intent earlier in the day.

"Our future is predicated on the last game that you play," Kelly began. "So, we begin today by talking about what our future is going to look like. I think we all know, and I've made it pretty clear, that after the last game you play you want to begin taking that next step forward. For us, taking that next step forward is to continue to build our football program within and developing football players so when they get back on that field in 2013 we finish it off. "

"Finishing" is about the next phase of "the process" that is more than about just being in the BCS Championship Game - it's about winning it. Kelly went on to say he believes the 2013 recruiting class will help his Fighting Irish take that next step.

The 2013 class includes five offensive linemen (Hunter Biven, Colin McGovern, Mike McGlinchey, John Montelus, and Steve Elmer), four defensive backs (Max Redfield, Cole Luke, Devin Butler, and Rashad Kinlaw), four wide receivers (Corey Robinson, James Onwualu, William Fuller, and Torii Hunter, Jr.), three linebackers (Michael Deeb, Doug Randolph and Jaylon Smith), two tight ends (Mike Heurman and Durham Smythe) two defensive linemen (Jacob Matuska and Isaac Rochell) and quarterback Malik Zaire.

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Those 22 players kept their commitments to Notre Dame, even after the 42-14 loss to Alabama. More importantly, they stayed together even after the chaotic few days that followed the title game when Kelly's future at Notre Dame was up in the air.

"We eliminated confusion when we went back into the homes and all of our coaches were talking (with players and their families) and were clear with why they were coming to Notre Dame," Kelly said of how he and his staff kept the highly touted class together. I would say that's the premise."

Kelly continued by saying the bulk of the signees in the class made their decisions based on the faith-based education and "community" feel they will have at Notre Dame as well as the tangible proof they have that Notre Dame can compete for a national championship.

"I would say one last thing," Kelly continued. "We had a number of kids in this class that recruited each other and were coming for the same reasons. They communicated that to each other. That's what made this class such a strong class."

Heuerman and Onwualu are two members of the "Irish Mob" Kelly mentioned by name who were instrumental in helping recruit other members of the class of 22 (which could still end up being 24, depending on the decisions Eddie Vanderdoes and Tarean Folston are expected to make after this writing).

Unlike last year, this year's signing class included no last minute surprises. No players were poached by other schools unexpectedly. Kelly says he and his staff were surer that would not happen this time, because of the character profile they were looking for in players.

"I think what we did this year is we made sure where that commitment was," Kelly explained. "In other words, if you're committed that means you've ended this recruiting process. I think in some instances being firmer toward that end allowed this (lack of signing day drama) not to take shape."

Kelly is always ready to expect the unexpected though.

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Now, I'm gonna tell you - these are young guys," he added. "Things happen every year and I think you have to be prepared for that too."

Depth is what makes the college football world go round, and Kelly believes the 2013 class is geared toward giving his squad the depth they lacked in 2012 - especially in the trenches. The pitch he has to use could get harder in years to come if talent is being stockpiled, but Kelly does not see himself being concerned with that issue.

"They're not elite players if they're afraid of competition," Kelly said of players who might shy away from even the prospect of having to fight to earn a starting spot. "Those that back off and say 'well you've got two of these guys and you've got three of those'."

Lack of depth kept the Irish from being able to fully prepare for Alabama the way Kelly would have liked and having the numbers get back to 85 scholarship players consistently, which Kelly says will happen in 2013, is key to continuing to move the bar in the right direction.

"There were a number of times where I didn't feel comfortable going live against our defense," Kelly conceded of his concerns during what turned into a 12-0 regular season despite thin numbers on the offensive line. "One time we had five offensive linemen from that period of the USC game to the Alabama game that could go out there and function - with five offensive linemen."

"That impacts your program," Kelly continued. "I'm telling you, it impacts the way you practice. You don't get a chance to tackle quite as much, and all of those things begin to show themselves when you're below the scholarship numbers."

The numbers on the offensive line dip even more dramatically now, with the losses of Braxton Cave and Mike Golic, Jr. as well as the future uncertainty of players like Tate Nichols and Matt Hegarty. The five linemen in this class are expected to help that crisis situation quickly.

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"Probably we're in the red line in terms of critical need," Kelly said of depth on the line. "Next year it won't be quite in the red line of critical need. It'll move into still a need for us in our program to continue to build on the O-line."

Depth on the defensive line will be addressed in this class as well, but while the guys in the trenches will see their numbers bolstered, Kelly sees other positions where members of the 2013 class may make their mark on Saturdays more quickly.

"The running back position would be one where there should be some young players competing there," Kelly assessed. "The safety position - there should be some young guys competing at that, but every time I make that call it comes from somewhere else."

Kelly mentioned Bryant at running back and Redfield at safety as the two players who should compete for jobs as freshmen. Kelly mentioned wide receiver Chris Brown as a "sleeper" player on signing day last year, but he would not go there this year.

"I don't know that I want to set that precedent - each year calling one of these guys out," Kelly said. "I just think there's some guys that are really going to show themselves that maybe don't have the same regard as others."

*NOTE: Defensive lineman Eddie Vanderdoes and running back Tarean Folston signed their letters of intent with Notre Dame after Kelly's press conference and after this article was originally published.*

## **Thoughts With Elliott**

Irish safeties coach Bob Elliott underwent kidney transplant surgery on Wednesday. The first-year Irish assistant and long time coaching veteran received the kidney from his sister. Kelly's thoughts were understandably with Elliott.

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"He administered self-dialysis all year and yet never missed a day," Kelly said of Elliott. "He was out there coaching and working. He's just a great man. He's got great experience. I love having him on the staff and he'll get through this. It's a tough time for him right now, but I think you're going to see him back. He's a fighter and I expect to see him on the field in the spring."