

## Recruiting Road Map: West Coast

Written by Brian Smith  
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This first installment of Recruiting Road Map will be an overview of programs Notre Dame continues to compete with the most and forecasting the next few years, team by team, and region by region. Today will be a look at the Notre Dame recruiting efforts out West, focusing on Pac 12 opposition.

### The Competition

Certain teams tend to compete against Notre Dame for recruits year after year. There will be variances. The West Coast appears to be in a state of flux. Notre Dame should take advantage. Watching Troy fall will help the Irish the most.

**Southern California** – The Trojans continue to sink into the abyss. It's the way of "Old SC." That program, historically, goes up and down like a yoyo. Sanctions, me-first players, flamboyant coaches, and the limelight of Los Angeles *once again* caught up with the University of Southern California Football program. I expect Notre Dame to compete for the very best talent in California this year and moving forward because Troy is crumbling during this very moment. Mark it down:

#### Lane Kiffin

will not be in Los Angeles beyond 2014, if he's not canned after the 2013 campaign, and the Irish will take advantage. Kiffin will continue to corrode that program, and Notre Dame will benefit. Helping Notre Dame's cause will be the NCAA sanctions starting to truly take effect. The smaller recruiting classes (especially along the trenches) will make it difficult for the Trojans to win more than eight or nine games during any given season for the next three or four years. Without question, Notre Dame will be a major player for Southern California talent, especially the private schools in or near Los Angeles.

**Stanford** – Never thought I would say the following: Moving forward, Stanford appears to be the best program in the Pac 12. Southern California continues to trend down, Washington needs to make big leaps on defense, UCLA whimpered down the stretch of the 2012 season, Oregon State rarely does well from year-to-year, and Oregon appears to be waiting for the NCAA gavel to fall. As for Arizona and Arizona State, neither plays good enough defense for me to be comfortable in believing their offenses will offset their defensive deficiencies. Finally, because of what I expect to be a high level of on-field success due to a very young team this year, Stanford should be really good the next few years. Expect some really good recruiting battles between Notre Dame and Stanford across the country, and not just in California. Stanford could be a

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very important recruiting competitor during the next several years.

**UCLA** – Perhaps the most difficult team to understand, a couple of thoughts to consider. UCLA is located on a beautiful campus with beautiful women, plenty to do and see, and it's a top-notch education for those student-athletes that truly desire to learn. Will the Bruins become the prime competitor for Los Angeles area talent, replacing the Trojans? It's possible. Then again, will the Bruins take the next step forward and be a BCS contender, the type of program that elite California talent wants to play for? The answer to that question will be important because the Irish will certainly go into Los Angeles each and every year to recruit the best of the best.

**Oregon** – Notre Dame recruits some of the same prospects as Oregon, but overall, it's not a significant amount. With the NCAA close to bringing sanctions, it's doubtful that Notre Dame will compete with Oregon for much longer. Look for this program to make a major step back. Additionally, with **Chip Kelly** looking at the NFL...

**Washington** – The power of "Tosh" did not really come to fruition at Washington, at least this year. Of course I am referring to Tosh Lupoi, the assistant coach that recruited so well for Cal-Berkeley before moving to the University of Washington roughly a year ago. The Huskies are currently ranked no. 12 within the Rivals.com recruiting rankings, but no 5 star talent, and only six 4 star prospects. The Huskies recruit California hard, but not many of those prospects strongly consider Notre Dame and Washington. Maybe that changes with Washington breaking through on the gridiron during the 2013 season would create more recruiting competition with Notre Dame?

**Arizona and Arizona State** – Notre Dame does hit the state of Arizona pretty hard. I expect a few more recruiting battles with the Wildcats and Sun Devils than usual, and those battles could spill over into California as well.

**Colorado, Utah, Oregon State and California** – Notre Dame will not be battling these four teams very often. The Irish generally recruit a higher level of talent, often times different high schools, and different social fits than these four programs.

**Washington State** – If Notre Dame would begin to recruit against the Cougars, something went terribly wrong. This is the outpost of the Pac 12, with the "Pirate" at the helm. Yeah, Notre Dame

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will not be facing Washington often, if at all, on the recruiting trail.

### Final Thoughts

I would like to see a bottom end number of three West Coast recruits per year. The combination of players per state should not matter much, with a caveat. There's plenty of talent in Arizona and Washington in addition to California, but of course the sheer numbers from the Golden State make it the no. 1 target.

Notre Dame signed just one California prospect (**Tee Shepard**) last year, and we all know how that worked out. Notre Dame signed a grand total of eight California prospects from 2009-2012, to amount to an average of two per year. More importantly, Notre Dame needs to sign elite California talent. Due to the Trojans' slide, I believe Notre Dame will start doing much better in California than an average of two per year, and the star power will rise as well. Averaging four California prospects per year would not be shocking, honestly.

It cannot be stressed enough how important Southern California's downfall will be for Notre Dame's recruiting fortunes. I truly believe that program will watch the wheels fall off during the course of the next 12 to 24 months. That means Notre Dame will sign at least one more big-time recruit, per year, during the time the Trojans are down.

*Within the next addition of Recruiting Road Map, a look at the competition for the talent within the state of Texas.*