

Recruiting Road Map: Texas

Written by Brian Smith

Tuesday, 15 January 2013 10:39

Notre Dame began to make inroads into Texas the past few years, and I expect the number of signees to increase moving forward.

Texas – Like the Trojans, the Longhorns appear to be headed in a downward spiral. As the dominant in-state recruiting power, that's significant. The area to watch will be Dallas, suburban Dallas in particular. The 'Horns usually land the best of the best from the suburban Dallas schools. That's significant because besides Los Angeles, no other area produces more Division I talent than the Dallas area. Look for the Irish to now challenge the 'Horns for those prospects. Ten years ago, no way Notre Dame would sign elite talent that the Longhorns wanted. Now it's a real possibility. The Houston area also holds value.

Notre Dame signed **Nicky Baratti** from the Houston area last year, and Houston will continue to be a city that Notre Dame targets moving forward. Like Dallas, there's plenty of talent.

Special Notice

What will be really interesting during the remainder of the Mack Brown tenure will be the rural Texas prospects, and in some cases, perhaps inner city kids from Houston or Dallas. Most of those young men, as a rule, stay closer to home. With Notre Dame's resurgence it's not out of the question for Notre Dame to land a few of those prospects even if the Longhorns make early offers. Keep an eye on east Texas talent. Notre Dame rarely signs players from this region, but it's always been loaded with talent. From a little research of Irish players from east Texas since 1992, only **Bobby Taylor** (Longview), **Anthony Denman** (Rusk), **Ronnie Nicks** (Kilgore) and **Tyreo Harrison**

(Sulpher Springs) signed with Notre Dame from the 1992, 1996, 1997 and 1998 recruiting classes. If Notre Dame can dip into this particular region of Texas, it will greatly bolster Notre Dame's roster. Notice how each of those four players were very good athletes that could run, and all four played defense for the Irish. Notre Dame will need to compete with two other Southwest stalwarts to gain not only east Texas prospects, but Texas prospects as a whole.

Texas A&M and Oklahoma – I expect both of these teams to be constant competitors for top Texas talent, and that's not an epiphany by any means. Notre Dame will certainly bump heads with each program. Both teams will be good moving forward, and the Aggies could even be a

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top five team again next season. Due to proximity, Notre Dame will lose most of those battles, but the Irish should still win enough battles to land two to four recruits from Texas each year, and those prospects could come from any location within the Lone Star State. Inner city recruits, east Texas, San Antonio, Dallas, or the west Texas oil fields could see Notre Dame snag a recruit.

As noted above, Notre Dame could go after east Texas prospects. Texas A&M always recruited east Texas hard, and many of those kids allegedly "fit in" to the College Station campus quite well. Same situation with Oklahoma, as the Sooners recruit Texas very hard, east Texas included. Keep an eye on these two programs. Further, the Bayou Bengals recruit Texas hard each year, and Notre Dame will bump into the Tigers on both sides of the east Texas border.

LSU, Baylor, TCU, Oklahoma State and Texas Tech

I do not believe Notre Dame will lose many true recruiting battles to these programs. Why? As a rule, if Notre Dame offers a Texas prospect and that prospect receives an offer from at least one of the programs listed above, one of two things will happen. 1) The recruit wants something different, i.e. leaving the Southwest, and Notre Dame will be a major player; 2) the recruit does not seek what Notre Dame offers away from the gridiron, such as academics being too much for him or a different type of social life that a smaller school does not offer. Still, each of the five schools listed above could battle Notre Dame for a recruit or two because all of them recruit Texas hard. One never truly knows in advance.

Names to remember

A few of the better Texas prospects I watched on film. Time will tell if Notre Dame becomes a serious player.

Davion Hall, WR/S, 6-3, 193, Texarkana (Liberty-Eylau) - Flat-out NFL talent. Reminds me of former Alabama great and current Atlanta Falcon **Julio Jones**. Without a doubt he possesses the size, speed, and toughness to be a great player. He's also a thumper at safety. Relishes contact!

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Nick Watkins, CB/WR, 6-1, 180, Dallas (Bishop Dunne) – One of Notre Dame's top cornerback targets for next year, but could also play wide receiver. Talented on and off the gridiron. Possesses the height and length Notre Dame defensive coaches seek for the cornerback position. Provides the ability to quickly stop and start, tip-toe along the sidelines to make a catch or interception, and make sudden explosive movements towards the football. Watkins will be a national recruit.

Koda Martin, DE/TE, 6-6, 245, Manvel -- My only concern with Martin stems from which position to play him at. He's an excellent tight end and defensive end. Due to his long frame and quick feet, I would give the slight edge to defense, for now. He's incredibly nimble. Further, he's a tremendous blocker with a propensity for physical contact. From all of the players I watched for the class of 2014, regardless of state or position, Martin earned a spot in my top 25. I will certainly watch numerous players from this point forward, but there's no doubting he's a special talent.

Darrion Johnson, CB, 5-11, 170, Brenham - Oklahoma offered before the start of his junior year and Texas appears to be very close to offering. I only watched his sophomore footage on YouTube, but it's well worth it. He's a clone of KeiVarae Russell. Definitely a big-time recruit. Quick feet, excellent hands, and a very good leaper. He could also play free safety or wide receiver.

Solomon Thomas, DE, 6-3, 265, Coppell – Extremely quick from the snap of the football; a high-motor player. Will be a pass rushing threat at the college level. Texas, Alabama and some of the nation's most well-known programs offered already.