

Recruiting Road Map: SEC West

Written by Brian Smith
Thursday, 24 January 2013 10:29

Notre Dame needs a few for big-time players to get over the top and be a national champion. Perhaps the Irish will raid the area producing the talent that's helping Alabama win national championships, the SEC West region.

Louisiana and the SEC West

Louisiana – I lived in Louisiana for a few months. It did not take long to realize that many native Louisiana folks do not want to fit in elsewhere, or at least could they be happy away from their Louisiana roots for very long. There's no place in the United States like Louisiana. The Louisiana cuisine, music, culture and landscape are truly unique. Therefore, Notre Dame will not likely land many Louisiana prospects during any given period of time. With Notre Dame on the upswing, there's still a chance for the Irish to land a recruit per year from down on the bayou. Keep an eye on Notre Dame's recruiting efforts at the truly elite public schools, as well as the private schools within Louisiana, both of which produce very talented prospects that Louisiana State and other SEC programs covet. I am by no means predicting Notre Dame to do well in Louisiana, but it would not shock me to see Notre Dame land at least one Louisiana player during the next couple of years. Something else to consider would be the "Tigahs" down fall since its bowl game.

Why did so many Louisiana State players declare for the NFL draft ? There's been some well documented discomfort between players and the Tigers strength and conditioning staff, and that probably means the coaching staff as well. Too many so-called borderline NFL players decided to cast their lot away from Baton Rouge. Something is amiss. From personal experience, any LSU football news makes its way through the state, good or bad. Recruits will hear about the issues within the confines of the LSU football complex. With dissention in the ranks, recruits might be a little more wary of casting their lot with Louisiana State.

Here are a few recruits Notre Dame began recruiting all the way back to last spring:

Gerald Willis III, DE, 6-3, 270, New Orleans (Edna Karr) – Might be the best all-around defensive end in the country for 2014. Plays the run as well as he rushes the quarterback. That's rare for a high school defensive end.

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Speedy Noil, WR/CB, 5-10, 175, New Orleans (Edna Karr)

Kenny Young, LB, 6-1, 210, River Ridge, LA (John Curtis) – From the same high school as former Notre Dame All-American linebacker **Michael Stonebreaker**.

Malachi Dupre, WR, 6-3, 180, River Ridge (John Curtis)

Leonard Fournette, TB, 6-1, 225, New Orleans (St. Augustine) – Might be the best big back in America. He can pick his school. Earned an offer from LSU during his freshman year of high school.

Notre Dame will also investigate some northern Louisiana prospects, but that's a really tough area for Notre Dame from a cultural perspective. Time will tell how that plays itself out.

Arkansas – If there truly is one state that Notre Dame will rarely land a prospect, it's Arkansas. Most of the kids do not fit in from a cultural perspective, and the number of elite recruits wanes compared to Louisiana. With that said, Notre Dame did make a run at **Altee Tenpenny** from North Little Rock. Here are the handful of prospects that Notre Dame might pursue for 2014:

Jack Kraus, TE, 6-5, 220, Bentonville

Josh Frazier, DT, 6-4, 320, Springdale (Har-Ber) – One of the top defensive linemen in the land for 2014, Frazier holds offers from Arkansas, Alabama, and UCLA. Look for that number to go well past twenty before spring concludes.

Bijohn Jackson, DT, 6-2, 330, Eldorado – A similar player to current Notre Dame nose guard **L**

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Jackson committed to Arkansas, but that will not stop programs such as Notre Dame from recruiting him.

Recruiting Mississippi and Alabama

Much like Louisiana, this will be a case by case basis. Sure, Notre Dame will offer the truly elite prospects. Why not? There's nothing to lose. Do not expect the Irish to extend vast resources on this territory, but probing for the prospect that seeks to leave Dixie makes for a good recruiting practice. It's anyone's guess if Notre Dame will be able to secure the signature of a top-flight prospect from this region, but historically Notre Dame pulled surprises even the most diehard Irish fan would be surprised at. **Melvin Dansby** from Birmingham, AL and **Jarious Jackson** from Tupelo, MS signed with Notre Dame in 1993 and 1995.

Rod Taylor, OL, 6-4, 310, Jackson, MS (Callaway) – Alabama offered Taylor. Alabama knows offensive linemen.

Jamoral Graham, ATH, 5-11, 170, Decatur, MS (Newton County) – Very fast and dangerous with the ball in his hands. National recruit.

While not writing off the state of Alabama, it's hard to imagine any success with recruits in a state where the Crimson Tide rules supreme. Maybe this will be the year of the Melvin Dansby recruit? He signed with Notre Dame shortly after the Tide won the 1992 national title.

SEC West Goals – No reason to sugar coat it. Even if Notre Dame lands one talented prospect from this region, per year, I would be quite happy. The quality of talent in this region often proves to be no. 1 overall, per capita, based on NFL rosters. Southern Louisiana might be the most talent rich region in the country. Now, Notre Dame needs to find a way to crack open the door. Sign a player that Louisiana State and/or Alabama covets from this region and other recruits will notice. It's much the same situation with Notre Dame recruiting Texas three years ago. It was ugly, often, and it took quite a while for the truly elite prospects to even consider Notre Dame let alone take an official visit or cast their lot with the Irish. This area will take time.

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The outlook for this year should not be all that good, but the issues with the Bayou Bengals provide hope. I suspect a few Louisiana prospects to begin looking outside the state borders. The biggest goal will be for Notre Dame to land unofficial and official visits from prospects from Louisiana. Once on the Notre Dame campus, who knows? Sometimes kids want a different environment for college. Let's see what Notre Dame can do this year. I expect a few Louisiana kids to visit Notre Dame, and I would not be shocked if prospects from Arkansas, Mississippi or Alabama visit Notre Dame as well. Come the classes of 2015 and 2016, Notre Dame should begin to sign some prospects from this region if the coaching staff stays after it.