

Evaluating The Notre Dame Recruiting Class

Written by Brian Smith
Wednesday, 06 February 2013 13:19

From impact players to the kids I expect to redshirt, here are my thoughts about the Notre Dame class of 2013.

Impact Players

Without a doubt **Greg Bryant** will be a major factor next season. I expect him to start at some point next year. He's an every-down-running back. That's hard to find. He's one of those rare prospects that I will go ahead and call him a three-and-out player, i.e. he'll turn pro early. His style of play fits the NFL quite well.

Perhaps the most talented safety to sign with Notre Dame since **Bobby Taylor** inked his letter of intent in 1992 would be

Max Redfield

. The one time Southern California commitment will make a major contribution. Much like Bryant, I expect him to start at some point next season. At the very least, he will be in the rotation because he brings the speed to the safety position that Notre Dame rarely signs. He's just too gifted to stay off the field.

Jaylon Smith needs to find a position. Or does he? My guess will be for Smith to move around a little bit during his freshman season, especially during third down plays so that he can be a pass rusher that other teams will not definitively know where he will line up before the snap of the football. Perhaps he plays CAT, perhaps DOG, perhaps both. Regardless, Smith shall be playing quite a bit of football for the Irish next fall. Incredible talent, incredible young man!

Few prospects bring the versatility that **Tarean Folson** brings to the table. He could play safety, cornerback, wide receiver or running back. The Irish coaching staff will utilize him as a running back and slot wide receiver, a la

Theo Riddick

. With Riddick departing, there's a chance that Folson could possibly seize a great deal of playing time next fall even with Bryant on the field at the same time. He's one of the most mature young men I ever met, and I hold high expectations that Folson will eventually be a team captain and future NFL player.

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Should play as a freshman

As athletic as **Isaac Rochell** proved to be during his high school career, it's simply hard to learn the nuances of defensive line play. Further, Notre Dame returns ample defensive line talent for next season. Look for Rochell to play next year, but I do not see him logging major minutes versus Michigan, Stanford, and Southern California where one mental mistake could change the course of the game.

Notre Dame went from the outhouse to the penthouse with its cornerback situation last year. With two starters returning, plus the starter at nickel back, and **Lo Wood** returning from injury, it might be hard for a freshman cornerback to play significant minutes next year. Then again, **Cole Luke**

should not be considered just any freshman. He's extremely talented and at worst he should be a part of the special teams units for the Fighting Irish. Like Rochell, I expect him to earn some cornerback playing time versus some teams that Notre Dame should be prohibited favorites against like Temple, Purdue, and Navy.

Predicting the players that will redshirt can prove to be difficult

If I had my druthers, no player beyond the ones mentioned above will play next fall in an effort to preserve a year of eligibility. Due to injuries, that scenario will not likely play itself out the way I prefer it to play itself out. Time will tell, but most likely another three to five freshmen will play next year, even if just on special teams.

What I like best about this class

Balance. Finally. Notre Dame rarely signs recruiting classes with good balance. In fact, this might be the most well balanced class Notre Dame signed in the past decade. That's important to note because opponents often times find a weakness and exploit it while Notre Dame's best

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players become reduced in their role in a game. This type of recruiting class helps to reduce that trend.

Biggest concern

Will **Malik Zaire** be the heir apparent to **Everett Golson**? If a program does not do well at quarterback, that program is all but doomed to fail. Zaire fits the profile that the Notre Dame coaching staff wants for the quarterback position, but is he truly going to be able to transition from an option-based attack at the high school level to the fast paced offense that Notre Dame runs from time to time? It's not a given that he will. Zaire's athleticism and arm strength give me great hope, however, and I am confident that the Irish coaching staff will push to be great.

No player in this recruiting class should be questioned

This class represents the first class without a single recruit that I did not want since I began covering Notre Dame recruiting. I mean that. I'm very picky, yes, but I'm also a realist that understands for Notre Dame to compete for national titles every scholarship must count. This class will bring a great deal of competition to the practice field from day one of the 2013 fall camp. That's good for the program. Down the line, I expect a great deal of these young men to be starters and major contributors.

We Want Eddie!

The smoke appears to be quite positive for **Eddie Vanderdoes** signing with Notre Dame. He's obviously one of the most impressive defensive line prospects in the country with UCLA, Alabama, and Southern California being his other finalists. Stay tuned to the Irish Sports Daily message boards for up to the minute updates about Vanderdoes until his decision later tonight.

Player I would love to add to this class that never really considered Notre Dame

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O.J. Howard, TE, 6-6, 230 Autuga, AL – He's signing with Alabama. Why Howard? He's the only kid that **Jaylon Smith** did not shut down during the camp circuit. That's it. One player. That tells me quite a bit about Howard's talent because Smith is a future NFL linebacker.

Final Thoughts

I am a very happy Notre Dame fan. This program needed another shot of athleticism and size, and that's what Notre Dame signed today. Simply put, Irish fans should be very happy. This recruiting class will help Notre Dame remain a major factor in the national title race.