

## Report Card: Class of 2013

Written by Sean Mele

Wednesday, 06 February 2013 20:54

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All the players who said they were going to send Notre Dame and head coach Brian Kelly national letters of intent did so today as planned. The only player who left any doubt as to when he would become Irish was defensive lineman Eddie Vanderdoes from California, but he was never a verbal commit to the Irish in the first place. Notre Dame filled some needs at many positions (running back) and added depth to others (cornerback). There were also some surefire superstars and a few who flew in under the radar. So with that, here's my report card on a position by position basis of those players who signed on the dotted line today.

(Note: "A" in the highest grade available on the grading scale.)

### QUARTERBACK

Malik Zaire made the choice to come to Notre Dame even though he knew starter Everett Golson was more than likely locked in as the starter the next three years. That tells me he wants to compete and battle for playing time. Still, my guess is he's redshirted in 2013 and by the time Golson graduates he'll still have two years of eligibility remaining. Zaire can throw well and adds the dimension of being able to run too. He'll also learn the offense behind a player with his style in front of him, so he'll have a great picture of what it looks like when the reins are turned over to him. **Grade: B+**

### RUNNING BACK

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Greg Bryant and Tarean Folston are good enough to see the field in 2013 and there's no doubt in my mind they can both handle the responsibility. There's nobody I look at on Notre Dame's current roster and think, "He's that much better than Bryant and Folston and he's going to prevent them from seeing time." They offer elusiveness, vision, the ability to run the ball inside or outside, and can be dangerous in the passing game. This will be a powerful one-two punch in South Bend for four years, but my money is on one of them leaving early for the NFL. **Grade: A**

### WIDE RECEIVER

I'm a big fan of this group of receivers and although there isn't a deep, big play threat, I'm confident there will be plenty of production of out them in the years to come. There's the big target in Corey Robinson, the playmaking slot receiver in Torii Hunter Jr., the versatile "do it all" weapon in James Onwualu, and the incredibly gifted, but underappreciated Will Fuller. Onwualu may be the only one who challenges for playing time right away, but the other three will grow physically and mentally over the next year and surprise a lot of people. **Grade: B+**

### TIGHT END

Mike Heuerman and Durham Smythe will be nice additions to the tight end ranks for the Irish. Smythe can line up all over the field much like Tyler Eifert and does not get enough praise for his blocking. Heuerman has more of an edge to him and will be a better in-line option, although he has really good hands as well. There's a chance both of these guys could get some playing time if Ben Koyack's blocking doesn't improve and Alex Welch isn't back 100% after his injury. Even if they both get redshirted the future is bright at "Tight End U." **Grade: A-**

### OFFENSIVE LINE

Not only did Notre Dame improve depth with this group, they improved the quality of their depth as well. It's one thing just to add players for numbers, but it's a completely different story when those players have talent and size. Mike McGlinchey and Steve Elmer will play tackle and their long arms will help them tremendously at pass protection. Colin McGovern, Hunter Bivin, and John Montelus will play inside and help bolster guard and center. Playing right away on the

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offensive line is a tough task and the chances are with three starters returning that all five will be redshirted barring any injuries to the veterans. If I was forced to pick someone who *could* play early it would most likely be Elmer at right tackle.

**Grade: A-**

### DEFENSIVE LINE

Eddie Vanderdoes is a high speed bowling ball that has the feet of a featherweight fighter. Not to mention he's strong as a bull. Look for him to see playing time right away at nose-guard or even defensive end. What a great way to finish the day for Kelly and his staff. Jacob Matuska is my sleeper of this recruiting class. I think he has all the tools to be a tremendous defensive end in Notre Dame's 3-4 scheme. He has the frame to pack on the pounds, the athleticism to get off the ball, and above all, the motor to just terrorize opposing offenses. Issac Rochelle is a bit of an unknown in terms of how he'll adjust to playing defensive line fulltime, but he has the size and footwork that translates into success. Both of these players will play and play a lot for the Irish, but Matuska will probably see the field first. **Grade: A**

### LINEBACKER

If Notre Dame only secured Jaylon Smith in this class they would still get an A for their linebackers. Smith is a hard hitting, intense, and extremely athletic player who will be on the field in 2013 as more than a special teams player. Michael Deeb adds depth to the inside linebacker spot and will work his butt off in the process. He'll be asked to do one thing at MIKE and he'll do it well for his entire stay in South Bend. Doug Randolph is another sleeper for me who can play inside or outside for the Irish. He can come off the edge and get to the passer or stick his nose in the running game. **Grade: A**

### SAFETY

Max Redfield is an elite recruit with an upside that knows no limits. He can run, hit, and cover. He has tremendous range and size (6-foot-3) to go along with killer instincts. Redfield, like Jaylon Smith, will compete right away for valuable playing time regardless of the number of safeties currently on the depth chart. He can make an impact right away and don't be surprised if he's starting by the middle of the season. **Grade: A**

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### CORNERBACK

Similar to offensive line, this is a position where Notre Dame added depth and talent. Devin Butler and Cole Luke aren't running backs or wide receivers who are making the transition to defense - they are cornerbacks through and through. Butler is physical and will punch you in the mouth in the run game while Luke is a technician who will eventually turn into a shutdown corner. Rashad Kinlaw brings a ton of speed and athleticism to the position, but it's relatively new to him and will take some time to get used to it. The current corners starting for the Irish are pretty darn good, so I'm not sure how much these three will play in 2013. Whatever happens, the future is bright in the Irish secondary. **Grade: B+**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

The Irish got a pretty good punter in Andrew Antognoli and he's worth mentioning and deserves a grade. This fills a need and gives Notre Dame a player who averaged over 40 yards a punt in high school. He was considered one of the top punters in the nation for his class. Antognoli can also kickoff and kick field goals if the Irish ever need him in a pinch. **Grade: B**

**Overall grade for 2013 recruiting class: A**