

## Pursuit Of 2013 QB

Written by Christian McCollum  
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When Chuck Martin replaced Charley Molnar as Notre Dame's offensive coordinator more than a year ago, one thing became clear immediately in terms of recruiting: the two had differing views on evaluating quarterbacks.

One of Martin's first acts after switching from defense to offense was to turn up the heat on Devin Fuller in the 2012 recruiting class. Molnar viewed Fuller as an athlete – possibly a receiver or cornerback – but Martin saw Fuller as a quarterback first and was on the verge of securing an official visit from the New Jersey prospect before Gunner Kiel enrolled at Notre Dame at the last moment instead of LSU.

Around the same time, Martin had his eye on the 2013 quarterback class.

Under Molnar, the Irish had settled on Matt Alviti as their top quarterback target for 2013. Alviti flirted with an early commitment to the Irish, but oddly to some, he was torn between Notre Dame and Northwestern. When Martin took over, he quickly turned his attention to another Midwestern signal-caller, Ohio's Malik Zaire.

Notre Dame's timing couldn't have been better.

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Zaire had been high on the in-state Buckeyes early, but as Ohio State made its own transition to new coach Urban Meyer, those feelings were starting to dissipate. The Buckeyes had identified Zaire as their top quarterback target in 2013 and while Meyer reiterated that stance when he took over, his actions didn't line up with that viewpoint. Meyer asked Zaire to come back to campus to throw for him while also extending offers to other prospects in short order.

Zaire put more weight in Meyer's actions than his words and started considering all of his options right when the Irish were coming in. Notre Dame offered Zaire shortly after National Signing Day for the Class of 2012.

Notre Dame had also extended offers to dual-threat prospects like Illinois' Aaron Bailey and Texas' Tyrone Swoopes along with Kohl Stewart and Cody Thomas, also of Texas, but the Irish didn't waste time getting things moving with Zaire.

Zaire was also giving Wisconsin, Pittsburgh and Nebraska serious looks, but it became clear the Irish were near the top as a visit to South Bend for Notre Dame's Junior Day neared. Brian Kelly helped that push with a phone call to the Ohio prospect in advance of the trip.

Zaire already had a deep appreciation for the Irish tradition, he knew the Notre Dame degree would open doors for him down the road and generally liked the coaches, but he did have one reservation and it was a big one.

He didn't expect to land at a college where he'd be the starting quarterback as a true freshman - in fact, an opportunity like that would have caused concerns about the team around him - but he wasn't going to go somewhere and just sit on the bench for three years either. Zaire knew the Irish had just landed Kiel, the top-ranked quarterback in the class ahead of him, and wasn't going to go to South Bend just to be his backup.

Martin and Kelly were able to convince Zaire that he'd get an honest opportunity to compete for the job as soon as he was ready .

Coming into the visit, Zaire told Irish Sports Daily that he could see himself committing if he "fell

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in love.” He did and shortly after leaving campus, Zaire called Kelly to offer his commitment.

Notre Dame, Kelly and most notably, Martin, had their man.