Make no mistake, there were some pretty nervous people inside the Guglielmino Athletics Complex at Notre Dame on National Signing Day when running back Tarean Folston's fax didn't come through early that morning.

Were those concerns grounded in reality? That may never be completely known even by those on the inside, but the Irish had to be wondering whether Folston was having second thoughts and whether he was reaching out to other schools at the last minute. He was expected to send his fax in shortly before 9 a.m., but it wasn't received until about six hours later.

Throughout it all though, Folston and his camp never publicly wavered and the only impact the delay had was on Brian Kelly's press conference, where he couldn't talk about the back.

It was a circuitous route for sure, but Notre Dame couldn't be any happier with how running back recruiting ended in 2013. The Irish inked a pair of Florida running backs and both were at the top or very near the top of their recruiting board coming into the cycle.

That being said, early on it seemed if Notre Dame was going to be bringing in a pair of complementary backs, it would be a completely different duo.

Way back in August of 2011, Notre Dame running back coach Tony Alford extended an offer to Florida's Ryan Green before the speedster had even played a game as a junior in high school. The Irish ended up getting Green to campus for a game a couple months later and Green called the trip his best yet.

Green returned in March of 2012 for the Irish's Junior Day and left saying Notre Dame was his firm leader. He even seemed to be nearing a commitment, but as time went on, distance was clearly becoming a factor. In June, he committed to Florida State. There's no doubt that distance was the biggest factor working against Notre Dame and pretty much the only reason Green didn't end up in South Bend.

At about the same time the Irish were pursuing Green, Illinois' Ty Isaac represented a highly-rated Midwestern back. He made multiple trips down to South Bend and said positive things each time, but never seemed much more than lukewarm on the Irish. That feeling became more pronounced when he was downright giddy to land an offer from USC. It didn't take long for Isaac to make his pledge to the Trojans.

Notre Dame stayed in regular contact behind the scenes and was close to securing an official visit in the final weekend, but an in-home visit with the Trojan staff a week earlier sealed up Isaac's commitment. There seems to have been differing views from the Irish staff on Isaac; how important he was and exactly how and where he could help.

In the end though, Isaac would have been a luxury because Alford and the rest of the Irish staff managed to haul two of their top targets out of the state of Florida in Folston and Greg Bryant. It was an interesting path though, and one that included the surprise commitment of Texas running back Jamel James.

How much of a surprise was James' commitment? Irish Sports Daily was tipped off by a source in July that James was about to offer a pledge to Notre Dame. Asked who James was, even the source responded with, "I don't know."

James had never been to South Bend, but was legitimately high on the Irish and had no plans of looking around following an official visit to campus in the fall, but academics became a major sticking point. He didn't quite get the first-semester marks Notre Dame was hoping for and with

the new no-visit rule for committed prospects firmly in place by the Irish, James had no choice but to decommit and look for other options. James pulled another shocker by committing to Texas State a week before signing day.

Notre Dame also looked at other options at running back like California speedster Khalfani Muhammad - who the Irish liked, but never were in a position to accept a commitment from - and New Jersey back Corey Clement - who decommitted from Pittsburgh to commit to Wisconsin. Clement stuck with that pledge even as Notre Dame and other schools checked on him following Bret Bielema's departure. Altee Tenpenny always talked about taking an official visit to Notre Dame, but the Alabama commit never got close to seriously setting one up.

Still through it all, Folston and Bryant were players Notre Dame wanted desperately.

Folston was pegged by Notre Dame as an elite prospect around the same time as Green. He didn't get the same kind of fanfare because he didn't make any early trips to South Bend and kept a super low profile throughout the process.

There were reports that if Folston couldn't make it to Notre Dame for an unofficial during the summer, he wouldn't make it at all, but those were never true. Alford continuously worked behind the scenes and Folston made it to Notre Dame for an official in October.

Folston didn't make a commitment until last month's Under Armour All-America Game, but in reality, his decision was made after taking a trip to Oregon. As much as distance worked against Notre Dame with Green, it was even worse for Oregon's pursuit of Folston.

Auburn made a late pitch for him and even got him on campus for an official visit, but that only reassured Folston that he'd made the right decision. And even if Folston was having second thoughts at the very end, the Tigers had moved on when he told them a week before signing day that he was definitely headed to Notre Dame.

While Folston's recruitment picked up steam in the fall, Bryant's exploded in early December. The one-time Oklahoma commit didn't report any recent contact from Notre Dame until about a

week before taking an official visit to South Bend for the Irish's banquet. Coming into the weekend, Bryant –who had been on record saying he favored Southern schools and the SEC – was put on commitment watch and sure enough, he pulled the trigger just moments after Johnny Manziel won the Heisman Trophy over Manti Te'o.

Alford had to work hard in the final weeks, days and hours of the process to keep both Bryant and Folston and there was a time when Notre Dame was seriously worried about losing one, if not both. But the Irish now have a pair of running backs who are likely to be mainstays in their backfield for years to come.