Notre Dame continues to work their way south in search of a safety who can patrol the middle of the field and protect against the run and pass. The Irish have offered nine safeties from the class of 2014 and every one of them has been from the southeastern or southwestern United States. No state has had more safety prospects than Texas, where five offers have already been laid down including one to **Brandon Simmons** . The four-star defensive back has been wildly popular among just about every football conference in the country and to date he claims an impressive 32 scholarship offers. A few of the schools besides Notre Dame looking to wrangle for Simmons's services include LSU, Ohio State, Oklahoma, and Stanford. He's been active with visiting schools that he can drive to, but hopes to make a trip to South Bend this summer.

FRAME/GROWTH POTENTIAL

Simmons is one of those players whose height and weight readings are all over the board, so I'll do my best in hypothesizing where I believe he falls. He's listed anywhere between 5-foot-11 and 6-foot-1 and after seeing him on film I would say he's right around 6-foot or even a bit toward the 6-foot-1 mark. His high school has him down at 6-foot-1, but take it from a guy who used to fill out those rosters - we have a *slight* tendency to embellish the truth. His weight is said to be between 170 and 190 pounds and I would tend to place him right around 180 or maybe 185.

The thing I like about the Timberview High School standout's growth potential is he'll be a better, more impactful player when he gains another 20 to 25 pounds. The way he throws his

body around at his current weight makes it seem like he plays the game at 210 pounds, so when he adds to his frame it's only going to make him a bigger hitter and more powerful tackler. I also believe he could grow another inch or two before it's all said and done, which would add to his overall vision on the field.

ATHLETIC ABILITY

Simmons has pretty good speed and has been clocked at 4.60 in the 40-yard dash. Not exactly elite time, but he has game speed and can close on a ball carrier or cover the deep half of the field without any limitations. There are situations when he's locked up man-to-man on a slot receiver and he's like a blanket in coverage. Don't be overly concerned that he's not a 4.4 kid – his speed, or lack thereof, never has him out of position on the field.

You can check off all items on Simmons's laundry list when it comes to his footwork as a defensive back. His backpedal is quick and easy and when he's forced to attack straight ahead he's where he needs to be in a hurry. His transition from backpedaling to turning and running with a receiver is also sound and leaves no doubt to his ability to be deeper than the deepest. He's agile enough to work his way from one side of the field to another and make a tackle while bodies and potential blockers are falling all around his feet.

Simmons has good strength, which is evident in the way he plays the game. He gets rid of blocks really well and can lower the shoulder as a hitter too. He explodes with his lower body when tackling high or low and jumps explosively when in coverage or deflecting a pass on a blitz. Like I said before, the stronger he gets the better his game will become.

SKILLS/TECHNIQUE

Simmons plays great assignment football and it's clear when watching him he stays home and does his job first before looking to get involved in someone else's. There were two occasion in particular, one run and one pass, where he did his job and prevented a big play. The run play was just a matter of him knowing that he's the last man that can prevent a touchdown and if he gets caught up in the wash the running back is gone. He sat, bided his time, and made the sure tackle as the last line of defense.

The pass play saw him sit in his zone even though it was a full flow play to his left and the rest of his defense followed the ball. When the tight end dragged all the way across the field to his right he was in perfect position to run with him and deflect what would have been an easy touchdown. Had he flowed in the direction of the offense he never would have been able to recover or perhaps even see the tight end. Simmons has a good head for the game and sees play unfold before being caught out of position.

As I touched on already, he's a versatile player who can cover the slot in man or take the deep half. I wouldn't be surprised to see him find early playing time as a nickel back much like Notre Dame's Elijah Shumate. His ability to cover like a cornerback makes him a natural before he plays fulltime at safety.

Simmons is a reliable tackler who brings a little bit of nasty with him as well. I like his intensity and excitement when he makes big tackles or has a big hit. He takes proper angles to the football and fires through the ball carries legs with controlled aggression. He does a little bit of dragging and pulling when he tackles high and I'd like to see him use his legs more to finish the job. That being said, he's aggressive and packs a wallop at the point of attack.

OVERALL

Simmons is a sound safety who knows his craft and plays the game with a lot of heart and intensity. He has good speed and footwork that allows him to excel in man coverage, but can also fill the alley and help on the run. He would be a fine addition to Notre Dame's secondary and could help them in a number of ways including their nickel package. Hopefully he can find his way toward South Bend over the summer and get a look at the campus and meet the coaches.

GRADES

Size: 80 (height is fine – needs to pack on some pounds)

Strength: 80 (enough to do his job)
Speed: 83 (not elite, but has game speed)
Athletic Skills: 85 (footwork is great, breaks on the ball well, explosive)
Technique: 90 (knows his position inside and out and can execute what he knows)

Versatility: 90 (could play safety, corner or nickel)
Upside: 4.0 (like his potential to play in some capacity right away)
Overall Grade: 4.0

GRADE KEY

90-100 – Elite/Exceptional: Skill set is rare and gives prospect ability to dominate
80-89 – Very Good/Outstanding: Skill set is a significant strength
70-79 – Average: Skill set is solid, not a significant weakness
60-69 – Below Average: Skill set is not a strength for this player and could become a liability
50-59 – Very Poor: Prospect does not possess this trait and it is a definite liability

OVERALL/UPSIDE GRADE KEY

5 – Elite: Player is one of the best players at his position nationally, potentially dominant
4 – Very Good/Outstanding: Player is a potential standout and starter, could also play early
3 – Solid: Player is a potential contributor, could eventually start down the road
2 – Below Average: Player does not possess the talent to be a significant contributor
1 – Poor: Let’s be honest, Notre Dame is not going to bring in anyone with a one!