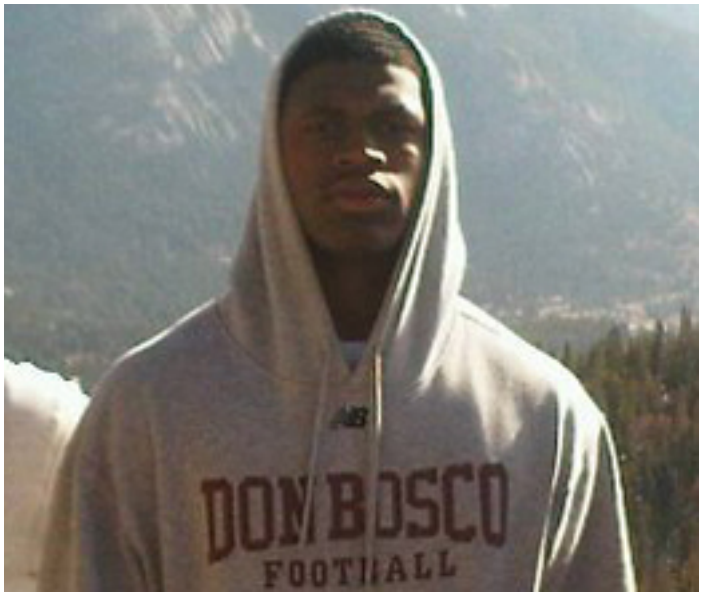

The 2013 recruiting class is shaping up nicely for Notre Dame fans, and I expect a lot more fireworks along the way.

The reality is there really aren't many spots left for top prospects when looking at the math. The math has been rehashed over and over, and after looking at the math, and digging behind the scenes, right now it looks like the Irish likely only have two, maybe three spots left, depending on what looks to be "likely" at this point. That's not many when one considers how many elite prospects are left on the board, and how many are starting to show recent interest in the Irish.

The number can change, certainly. It all depends on how many fifth-year players the Irish invite back. How many might leave the program or become physically unable to perform, and how many of the current commits stick with their commitment to Notre Dame.

The math currently shows 66 players with eligibility after this season and a total of 9 of those players are eligible for a fifth year. Those players are Nick Tausch, Dan Fox, Carlo Calabrese, Tyler Stockton, Chris Watt, Zack Martin, Tyler Eifert, Jake Golic and Cierre Wood.

Notre Dame cannot have more than 85 scholarship players in any given year. If Notre Dame invited everyone back who has eligibility remaining they'd only have 19 scholarships to give this 2013 recruiting season. With 22 verbal commitments already for 2013, it's obvious that some of those eligible will not be invited back for a fifth year.

Tyler Eifert is most likely just an announcement away from declaring for the draft, so that would make the number 20.

Based on past performance and playing time, Tausch, Stockton and Golic likely will not be back, either. So that makes the number 23. It's possible Notre Dame could cut loose one of Calabrese or Fox as they play the same position, but I don't anticipate that unless they find someone who is just too good to pass up at the very end.

Also, if Jamoris Slaughter were to be given another a medical redshirt year this year making him eligible to come back next year, you'll have to take one away from available slots. We likely won't know this for quite some time.

Many have speculated that running back Cierre Wood might not return and declare for the NFL draft. Based on what I've heard, I think that's more likely than not. The number then climbs to 24 if Wood declares, which would mean the Irish have two more spots left for the 2013 recruiting class.

At this point, Zack Martin would be the next likely candidate to possibly declare for the draft. The only question for Martin, most likely, is his actual size. Is he a guard or a tackle prospect? If he's a true tackle prospect his value in the NFL goes up. If he's only a guard prospect, his value would be less. If he's a guy who could play either, he obviously becomes more valuable. From what little digging I've done on the matter, I've heard Martin could end up in the second round depending on how he performs and measures in any draft combines. Sadly, that projection could be too much to pass up for the talented lineman. But, with a brother likely to start next year, and the chance for a National Championship season next year as well, Martin could stick around. I'd say this is probably 50/50 right now, but it would be purely a guess on my part.

Finally, it is possible for nose tackle Louis Nix to declare for the draft. Some projections have shown Nix as a first-round talent. Again, that may be too much for Nix to pass up, as it has been for many others, previously. I'd say Nix declaring is less likely than Martin at this point.

If both Nix and Martin declared, that would leave 26 slots---or four more slots for 2013. Since Notre Dame didn't max out last year by signing only 17 prospects in 2012, and they have some early enrollee candidates this season, they could sign more than the NCAA maximum of 25 per class and credit some their early enrollees to the previous class.

It's also possible that career-ending injuries could increase the possible numbers. Will Tate Nichols be able to fully recover and continue his career at Notre Dame? Is there anyone else who might end up being a medical hardship candidate?

Another factor would be losing a verbal commitment in this 2013 recruiting to another school. Linebacker Danny Mattingly continues to visit other schools, even though it's been communicated to him that the Irish staff would prefer he not. Running back Jamel James has also entertained the thought of visiting other schools but has not scheduled any visits as of yet after the same message was communicated to him. It's possible the Irish could lose one or two commitments along the way, but as of now both are expected to stick with their Irish pledge.

As you can see, the numbers don't suggest a lot of remaining spots left for 2013 recruiting prospects. With a number of elite prospects left on the board, it is possible the Irish could run out of scholarships in 2013.

At this point, two prospects seem to be very high on Notre Dame's wish list and both are defenders. Max Redfield is an elite safety prospect who I know the Irish would love to have. I'd guess the Irish will hold a spot for Redfield at this point. Another is defensive end/outside linebacker prospect Alquadin Muhammad. Notre Dame seems to be in fine shape with Muhammad as well and he's another elite prospect I think Notre Dame will wait for. Both could decide during their all-star game appearances in early January. With Muhammad, his team is still playing and won't be able to visit Notre Dame until his season is done. If his team makes it to the State Championship game, his team would play that game the weekend of December 7th and wouldn't be able to visit Notre Dame until the following weekend at the earliest.

If the Irish can secure commitments from both players, I expect them to look offense next if they have any available slots left. An elite running back seems to be high on the priority list. Floridians Greg Bryant and Tarean Folston appear to be the most likely candidates, but the Irish will revisit Ty Isaac again as well, a USC commitment from Joliet, Ill. Folston has visited Notre Dame already is likely down to Notre Dame and Oregon. A decision could come for him at the all-star game as well. Bryant is scheduled to visit Notre Dame next weekend.

If the Irish end up with a fourth slot, I'd expect it to go to the best available player. Illinois receiver Laquon Treadwell or Arizona corner prospect Priest Willis are two names to keep an eye on.

I also expect a number of new or possibly old names to pop up as well over the next few months. The Notre Dame staff has to cover all bases and will continue to recruit players regardless of how many commitments they have to make sure they can fill their remaining slots at the end.

Looking at the math, I think at least two if not three more spots will be available if nothing changes in regards to current commitments and medical hardships/transfers. The number will increase if they lose a commitment or two or some currently on the roster physically cannot perform moving forward.