

## Recruiting Week in Review

Written by Joe Bradshaw  
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Notre Dame's loss to Alabama in the national championship game was an eye-opening experience. Though many would argue that the Irish did not play anywhere near their best game against the Crimson Tide, it was clear that Alabama possessed much greater athletic depth than did Notre Dame. If the Irish hope to not just return to the national championship game but actually bring home the coveted Coaches' Trophy, they are going to need to improve their depth and athleticism. Their highly ranked 2013 class began that process but they need to follow that class up with one just as highly regarded in 2014. The Irish are off to a good start already but have a very long way to go before national signing day eleven months from now. However, if they can bring in top flight athletes like those Irish Sports Daily reported on last week there's little doubt that Notre Dame will once again sit near the top of the college football recruiting rankings again in 2014. What have you been missing by not being a member of Irish Sports Daily?

[Nick Watkins](#) , DB, 6-1, 185, Bishop Dunne Catholic School, Dallas, TX is a defender that is highly coveted by numerous top college football programs. Notre Dame is definitely on the list of schools that would love to earn Watkins' signature on signing day in 2014. For the Irish, he would add to 2013's defensive back haul that included such standouts as Max Redfield, Devin Butler, Rashad Kinlaw and Cole Luke. Notre Dame hopes that Watkins will serve as the cornerstone of their 2014 defensive back class. At this point the Irish and Watkins seem equally high on each other.

"I've had quite a bit of contact with Notre Dame and I try to call Coach (Kerry) Cooks every week," stated Watkins. "I try to stay in touch as much as I can and build that relationship because I really like Notre Dame quite a bit."

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The talented Texan knows exactly what he likes about the Irish.

“First of all it’s a school with a great tradition,” he explained. “You know every Saturday that stadium’s going to be packed and you’re going to be on TV every week. To tell you the truth I really like the gold helmets also, but it really seems like a great place and it seems like everybody gets along. From the outside it feels like they have a real community up there and that definitely intrigues me.”

Notre Dame has made inroads with him, but other programs have also caught his attention. He currently holds offers from schools such as Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Stanford, Texas, Texas A&M and UCLA in addition to the Irish. Nearly all of them have expressed his importance to their programs so his recruitment figures to be a long one. As Watkins works through his recruitment, he has one priority in his college choice that stands out above all others.

“Education will always be first with me,” he explained. “In all actuality, you can’t play football forever, so I’m looking for a place where I can get a great education and graduate. I’m also looking for a place with a great atmosphere and great coaches who want to see you succeed. It really has to have that great community feeling.”

Watkins is confident that the Irish will make his first cut down and possibly his final one as he narrows his list to more manageable levels. Of course, before he makes any decisions about Notre Dame he’s going to need to make it to South Bend though he’s not certain when that’s going to happen.

“Coach Cooks and I talked about when I might be able to get up there, but that’s going to be up to my parents and whether it’s financially possible for us,” he related. “We’re really going to try to see if we are able to do it, but if for some reason we can’t I’ll definitely be taking one of my officials up there, so one way or the other I’ll get to see Notre Dame.”

Most football players begin playing the game at very early ages. As with most sports it seems that youngsters start playing in organized leagues earlier and earlier. Occasionally, though,

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there emerges a young man that comes rather late to the game. This was the case for [Thomas Holley](#)

who, though a neophyte, appeared to be a prodigy in his first season of football. Holley, 6-4, 290, Abraham Lincoln High School, Brooklyn, NY previously limited his sports participation to basketball but decided to give football a try and very quickly began to make a name for himself.

“Thomas is an extraordinary story in his own right,” stated Lincoln head coach Shawn O’Connor. “He’s a kid that’s 6-4, 290 pounds and has never played football his whole life. He used to just be a basketball player, but now after playing football, he really seems to love the game. He takes coaching really well and he does amazing things with his size by the way he moves sideline to sideline.”

O’Connor continued.

“When you see ability like that and the way he dominates, you can’t help but get excited because he’s so raw and new. As a coaching staff, we can mold him and continue to help him get better than what he is now.”

Holley (pictured) is rapidly closing in on twenty scholarship offers and Notre Dame recently added its name to the list. Besides the Irish, he has received offers from Boston College, Baylor, Florida, Florida State, Maryland, Miami (FL), Mississippi, Penn State and Rutgers. Still, according to O’Connor, Holley was very excited about the Notre Dame offer.

“He’s definitely excited about the Notre Dame offer,” stated O’Connor. “It’s a school he got to watch participate in the national championship game and he knows they provide excellent academics.”

Because the Notre Dame coaching staff knew very little about Holley it was O’Connor who reached out to the Irish. O’Connor knows the staff well, having coached current Notre Dame outside linebacker Ishaq Williams.

“Obviously we have a great relationship with Notre Dame and Ishaq Williams is there,”

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explained the Lincoln head coach. “So I reached out to Coach (Bob) Diaco and told him I had another guy he really needed to take a look at. I sent them some film and his transcripts, because he’s a good student and a really good kid and they got a chance to analyze everything and we just received the offer today. It’s definitely exciting times.”

O’Connor hopes to see his defensive standout make a trip to South Bend sometime this spring or summer but that will have to wait until basketball season ends.

“Right now he’s playing basketball for our school and we don’t want him losing his focus on that right now, so we’ll be planning something soon, but I’m just not sure when.”

These two summaries represent just a sample of the Notre Dame football recruiting information available each week on Irish Sports Daily.