

IRISH INSIDER

NATIONAL SIGNING DAY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2013



**SIGN OF
THINGS
TO COME**

THE OBSERVER

Photo Illustration by Suzanna Pratt and Brandon Keelean

COMMENTARY

2012 momentum carries into 2013



Chris Allen
Sports Editor

Recruiting is a college football fan's most dangerous game.

It doesn't follow logic or lend itself to certainty. College football fans hope success on the field translates to success on Signing Day. But it doesn't always work out that way.

For Notre Dame fans, 2012 was a good year. The class of 2013 that came across the fax machines in the Gug offer a perfect capstone — and a sort of perfect symmetry for Irish fans hoping to build on 2012's success.

The 2013 class, just like the 2012 football team, is built around a star linebacker. Just as former linebacker Manti Te'o anchored the defense at the second level and led the team with a force of personality, so will Jaylon Smith impact future Notre Dame teams.

Smith, the No. 7 prospect in the country according to ESPN, is the kind of player that can change any team's fortunes. He committed to Notre Dame on June 2 and never wavered in his commitment to the Golden Dome through thick and thin. Irish coach Brian Kelly wants to anchor his program on players who appreciate what it means to play for Notre Dame — and he has one of those players in Smith. It certainly helps Kelly that Smith has the tools to be a ferocious outside linebacker that rushes like a defensive end and runs like a cornerback.

The similarities between the 2012 team and the 2013 class don't end there. The 2013 group includes a dual-threat quarterback (Malik Zaire), two pass-catching tight ends that can play like wide receivers (Mike Heurman and Durham Smythe), versatile cornerbacks experienced on the offensive side of the ball as well (Devin Butler and Rashad Kinlaw) and a big, physical defensive end from Georgia (Isaac Rochell). Sound familiar?

But there are also reasons to believe the 2013 class offers an even brighter future than the success 2012 offered. The 2012 team, for all its success, fell four touchdowns short of its ultimate goal. If Notre Dame is to conquer the SEC and hoist the crystal football, it needs game-changers who can impact

contests on the same stage that played out Jan. 7 in Miami. On that day, two game-changing running backs ran through Notre Dame's defense. Today, Brian Kelly locked down two game-changing running backs of his own in Greg Bryant and Tarean Folston — both from Florida. Folston has the speed and elusiveness, but it is the five-star Bryant who will come in and make an impact in the running game from day one. With Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood departing to the NFL Draft, Bryant is the kind of player who can come into fall camp and immediately clear up a muddled running back picture. Add in a late surprise signing from defensive lineman Eddie Vanderdoes, the No. 10 player in the country, and Kelly had stockpiled the kind of difference-makers to stare down Alabama and any other SEC power en route to a title.

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the 2013 recruiting class from a Notre Dame perspective is the tight-knit bond between the recruits that has developed over months. The reality of recruiting is such that within two or three years, these young signees will become team leaders. Early on in the recruiting process, wide receiver and current early enrollee James Onwualu brainstormed a name for the class with Zaire and Butler — it became the birth of the "Irish Mob." As the class grew, the recruits grew closer and welcomed new players to the "Mob" with hospitality and camaraderie. That closeness was put on display recently as Smythe, a Texas de-commit, visited campus. His fellow tight end Heurman, who had been committed for months, welcomed Smythe with open arms. Smythe committed to Notre Dame in a matter of days. This group has realized what clicked with the 2012 Irish team — a game is won by a team, not individuals.

The "Irish Mob" will only grow closer. On the heels of an all-around great season, it is an all-around great recruiting class.

Just how Kelly wants it.

Contact Chris Allen at callen10@nd.edu

The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of The Observer.

Kelly introduces class of 24 signed recruits



SUZANNA PRATT | The Observer

Irish coach Brian Kelly addresses the media during a press conference Wednesday. Kelly revealed his 2013 class of recruits, a 24-man group that has earned a top-five ranking nationwide from recruiting analysts.

By ANDREW OWENS
Assistant Managing Editor

Irish coach Brian Kelly arrived at the Signing Day press conference looking relaxed after a tumultuous month that included a blowout loss to Alabama, a flirtation with the Philadelphia Eagles and the Manti Te'o controversy.

But Wednesday was a cause for celebration for Kelly and his staff as they finalized a stellar 24-man recruiting haul that spanned the country and resulted in a consensus top-five finish for the Irish.

"It's an exciting day at Notre Dame, and it's exciting because it's centered upon our future," Kelly said. "I think we all know ... that after the last game you play, you want to begin taking that next step forward, and for us, taking that next step forward is to continue to build our football program within and developing football players, so when they get back on that field in 2013, we finish it."

Three of the five-star jewels of the class will fill needed positions for the Irish: linebacker Jaylon Smith, safety Max Redfield and running back Greg Bryant. While nearly all of the class had verbally committed prior to the start of the 12-1 season, Kelly said the successful season aided the recruiting process.

"I think it's crucial," said Kelly of the team's success. "I think you have to have

both to be able to get the players like a Greg Bryant. It can't just be on academics. We don't want them coming to Notre Dame just because of academics. We want the whole piece. And this was an indication that 12 wins definitely helps you in that process with a Greg Bryant.

"You know, we had 19 committed before the season started, and the guys that we got late, I think winning definitely had something to do with that."

Redfield, originally a USC commit, and defensive-line recruit Eddie Vanderdoes give the Irish more five-star commitments from California than any other school.

Vanderdoes faxed his Letter of Intent to Notre Dame just before 8 p.m. Wednesday and announced his decision minutes later at a press conference.

Whereas last year's class experienced late defections, the 2013 haul endured little adversity, with the exception of linebacker Alex Anzalone's January decommitment.

"I think what we did this year is that we made sure where that commitment was," Kelly said. "In other words, if you're committed, that means you've ended this recruiting process. And I think in some instances, being firmer toward that end allowed this not to take shape.

"Now, I'm going to tell you,

these are young guys. Things happen every year, and I think you have to be prepared for that, too."

Kelly said one of the key components of the class' camaraderie was Smith, a Fort Wayne, Ind., product and the state's top-rated player.

"I think leadership takes different forms, and he can be a leader just by his own actions, the way he handles himself," Kelly said. "He'll look you in the eye. I think those are all leadership qualities, as well. Do I think he's going to come in and be the vocal leader like [former Irish linebacker Manti Te'o] was on the field? No, I don't think so. But his actions and the way that he prepares himself and the way he plays the game, I think a lot of people will want to model after him."

With the 24 additions to the roster, Kelly said Notre Dame's depth is the best at any point during his three-year tenure.

"With this class, it really addresses some of our depth needs across the board," he said. "We played the national championship game under 85 scholarships. We did not have 85 scholarship players at that time. We had some depth issues. And I think we've addressed those depth issues across the board in year three."

Contact Andrew Owens at aowens2@nd.edu

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CLASS OF 2013



MALIK ZAIRE

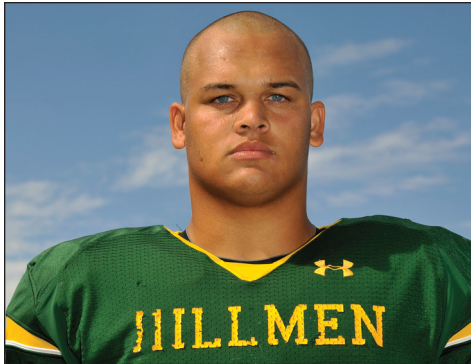
QUARTERBACK

6'1" • 196

*Archbishop Alter High School
Kettering, Ohio*

As one of five early enrollees this semester, Malik Zaire has taken the first step in his development as an Irish quarterback. Expectations for the left-handed quarterback likely include him following in the footsteps of Andrew Hendrix, Everett Golson and Gunner Kiel and redshirting in his first season. Zaire is a true dual-threat quarterback who operated a spread-option offense in high school.

While some quarterbacks may seek rushing yards at the first sign of trouble, Zaire used his mobility to bide time in order to continue to read coverages until a receiver broke open. On the relatively few occasions he was asked to throw, he displayed accuracy on deep, downfield throws. The majority of his rushing attempts came on designed run plays or read options, which were similar to plays Golson ran this season.



EDDIE VANDERDOES

DEFENSIVE LINEMAN

6'3" • 310

*Placer High School
Auburn, Calif.*

Rated as the No. 10 player in the country by ESPN, Eddie Vanderdoes is a physical force who profiles as the type of top defensive line talent Notre Dame has attracted in the past few years.

At 6-foot-3 and 310 pounds, Vanderdoes has the quickness and pass-rush ability to play defensive end to go along with the size and power to play inside in any defensive scheme. A former USC commit, Vanderdoes became interested in the Irish late in the recruiting process and chose to go to Notre Dame over UCLA and Alabama. Vanderdoes, who hails from Auburn, Calif., will push current Notre Dame sophomores Jarron Jones and Sheldon Day for playing time along the defensive line and is widely expected to be able to make an early impact.



Cocoa High School

TAREAN FOLSTON

RUNNING BACK

5'9" • 190

*Cocoa High School
Cocoa, Fla.*

Tarean Folston is the faster of Notre Dame's two running back recruits from the Sunshine State, and his 4.48-second speed in the 40-yard dash will be an asset in the Irish spread running game.

And as fast as Folston is, he's even quicker in his cuts. Where other shifty players may "jump cut" around would-be tacklers, Folston drives into every move, coming out of a cut with more momentum than he had going into it. He can string out plays and beat other players to the edge, or at a moment's notice decisively drive into a hole, where he does not shy away from contact.

With his elite quickness and skills both running and receiving the football, Folston should join upperclassmen like George Atkinson III and Davonte' Neal as versatile, explosive weapons in the Irish offense.



MAX REDFIELD

SAFETY

6'2" • 181

*Mission Viejo High School
Mission Viejo, Calif.*

Max Redfield, a 6-foot-2 athlete out of Mission Viejo, Calif., has promising size that profiles well at the safety position. The former USC commit pledged to join Notre Dame at the Under Armour All-American Game on Jan. 4 in Tampa, Fla.

The No. 23 overall player in the nation according to ESPN, Redfield has the speed and quickness to make plays in pass coverage as well as the size and strength to step up into the box and defend the run.

Redfield could play receiver at the collegiate level as well and, as a result, he has solid ball skills for a defensive back.

Though already very polished, Redfield still has a high ceiling.



American Heritage School

GREG BRYANT

RUNNING BACK

5'11" • 197

*American Heritage School Boca-Delray
Delray Beach, Fla.*

Greg Bryant is one of the highest-ranked recruits in this year's class, and fills almost all of the criteria for an elite young back.

The 5-foot-11-inch, 197-pound Bryant has an ideal body for the grind of college football and makes full use of it. He can pound through arm tackles inside and has the vision to turn two-yard gains into first downs.

And while Bryant is comfortable running inside, he should not be pigeonholed as a power runner. With a combination of vision and moves, Bryant is elusive enough to evade linebackers and fast enough to break open big plays when he reaches the second level.

With the graduation of seniors Cierre Wood and Theo Riddick, the well-rounded Bryant could challenge George Atkinson III and Amir Carlisle for carries this fall.



Derrick Mahone/Clayton News Daily

ISAAC ROCHELL

DEFENSIVE END

6'4" • 250

*Eagles Landing Christian Academy
McDonough, Ga.*

Isaac Rochell played both offensive and defensive line in high school but will join the Irish ranks as a defensive end.

Rochell received offers from the likes of Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma but committed to the Irish in June and will add considerable depth to the defensive line. ESPN rates him as a four-star prospect and the 13th best defensive end in the country.

The 250-pounder has a knack for getting in the backfield and is relentless in pursuing the quarterback. He recorded seven sacks and 24 tackles for loss during his junior year. Rochell already has the speed and size to compete in college but can still add bulk to improve his strength.



Joni Kuhn/Bishop Luers High School

JAYLON SMITH

OUTSIDE LINEBACKER

6'3" • 212

*Bishop Luers High School
Fort Wayne, Ind.*

Rated the No. 7 overall prospect in the country by ESPN, Jaylon Smith is widely considered the top outside linebacker prospect in the nation. The extremely athletic Smith has both the speed to cover receivers and the block-shedding ability to pressure the quarterback, and he could play either the cat or dog linebacker position in Irish defensive coordinator Bob Diaco's scheme. Irish coach Brian Kelly said Wednesday that Smith will challenge for playing time at the dog position.

Smith is a good tackler but could also add muscle to his frame to increase his strength.

Smith, the only Indiana signee for the Irish in the 2013 class, won a state championship all four years of high school at Fort Wayne's Bishop Luers. Though he also played running back for the Knights, he projects solely as a defensive player at Notre Dame.



Eric Albright/Midland High School

STEVE ELMER

OFFENSIVE TACKLE

6'6" • 305

*Midland High School
Midland, Mich.*

Steve Elmer is a dominant force on the field. In high school he played both defensive line and left tackle and made a difference on both sides of the ball.

The collective force of his 6-foot-6-inch, 300-pound body is nearly impossible to overcome on the high school level and profiles well at the major collegiate level. His size and strength allow him to make holes for his quarterback and running backs by sheer force.

He doesn't just stop the other team from getting to the quarterback, he tends to push them back several feet or more. Elmer projects as a stout offensive tackle for the Irish and has a high ceiling.



Prosper High School

TORII HUNTER JR.

RECEIVER

6'0" • 172

*Prosper High School
Prosper, Texas*

Torii Hunter, Jr. seems to have inherited his father's Gold Glove-caliber hands along with his name.

The wide receiver out of Prosper (Texas) High School can make just about any catch, whether he's stuck in traffic or wide open in the end zone. Once he gets the ball in his hands he's adept at finding the gaps and outrunning his opponents, but he doesn't shy away from contact — although primarily an offensive player, his high school highlights include a bone-jarring tackle.

Hunter committed to Notre Dame in September, but it might be a while before Irish fans get to see him in action. He suffered a gruesome broken leg a month ago during one-on-one drills before the Army All-American bowl and still has five to seven months of recovery before he can play again.



Apollo High School

HUNTER BIVIN

OFFENSIVE LINEMAN

6'6" • 290

*Apollo High School
Owensboro, Ky.*

Ranked as one of the top tackles in the country, Hunter Bivin committed to Notre Dame in March, selecting the Irish over Florida, Ohio State and Oklahoma, among others.

With his 6-foot-6, 290-pound frame, Bivin has the ability to overpower his opponents with raw strength. Although he struggles with his footwork at times, he displayed good agility and technique at the Under Armour

All-American Bowl in January.

Bivin largely lined up as a left tackle in high school but demonstrated the ability to play different positions on the line. He even saw some snaps at center, a rarity for a player of his size. Bivin projects to play inside at Notre Dame.

Bivin still needs to put on more weight and strength, but he could find himself in mop-up duty as early as next season.



Lincoln-Way West High School

COLIN MCGOVERN

OFFENSIVE LINEMAN

6'6" • 291

*Lincoln-Way West High School
New Lenox, Ill.*

One of the most sought-after prospects in the Midwest, Colin McGovern chose Notre Dame over a number of Big 10 programs, including Michigan, Ohio State and Nebraska.

At 6-foot-6 and 291 pounds, McGovern has a good frame for a lineman and also moves well for the position. He jumps off the line of scrimmage very well and is able to make plays in open space. McGovern also displays solid technique in run protection and in pass protection, an area where many high school linemen struggle.

McGovern saw most of his playing time at left tackle but can also play on the inside and is projected to be either a center or guard.

McGovern still has room to add weight but has the tools necessary to earn playing time earlier than most linemen typically do.



Brendan Hall/ESPNBoston.com

JOHN MONTELUS

OFFENSIVE LINEMAN

6'5" • 314

*Everett High School
Everett, Mass.*

The 6-foot-5, 314-pound Montelus is ranked by ESPN as the best player in Massachusetts.

Montelus projects as a strong offensive lineman with solid upper body strength, quick feet and long arms. Montelus likely has the requisite size to stick at his high school position of offensive tackle, but he could also play guard given his mobility.

Montelus has the explosiveness to get downfield and punish linebackers and defensive backs with his powerful run blocking. The lineman also has the lateral agility to hang tough in pass protection as the pocket moves.

Montelus committed to Notre Dame on April 21 and later, during his senior season, led his squad to its third consecutive Division 1A state championship with a 20-19 victory at Gillette Stadium, the home of the New England Patriots.



Barron Collier High School

MIKE HEUERMAN

TIGHT END

6'4" • 220

*Barron Collier High School
Naples, Fla.*

Brian Kelly and the Irish managed to snag tight end Mike Heuerman from the clutches of Urban Meyer and Ohio State. The four-star tight end from Barron Collier High School in Naples, Fla., cited tradition and the campus community as reasons for choosing Notre Dame over Ohio State, LSU and several other schools.

Heuerman stands 6-foot-4 and weighs 220 pounds. He is already a talented and dominant blocker with the potential to do even more damage on the outside once he fills out his tall frame. He plays smart and adjusts quickly when blocking.

Heuerman also runs a swift 4.69-second 40-yard dash. That speed coupled with his height will make him a big challenge to cover and a formidable receiving threat.



Woodberry Forest High School

DOUG RANDOLPH

LINEBACKER

6'3" • 221

*Woodberry Forest High School
Woodberry Forest, Va.*

A four-star recruit from Virginia, outside linebacker Doug Randolph's game centers on his strength and athleticism. He is a quick, resilient pass rusher whose agility allows him to maneuver in between offensive linemen in pursuit of the quarterback.

Randolph plays hard from whistle to whistle, bursting off the line at the snap and not stopping until he takes down the ball carrier. With his strength, Randolph often pushes through blocks and double teams, capping off the play with a tackle for loss.

Randolph also spent time on the other side of the ball as a tight end. Aided by his powerful build and steady hands, Randolph is most effective with mid- to long-range passes and as an alert blocker for his backs.



Hamilton High School

COLE LUKE

CORNERBACK

6'0" • 165

*Hamilton High School
Chandler, Ariz.*

Of the 24 commits to the Irish squad, Cole Luke is one of three players who projects to play cornerback, providing depth to the secondary.

The 6-foot, 175-pound Cole is average-sized, but he is extremely athletic and possesses strong footwork and coordination skills. He is tall and agile enough to defend against the ever-increasing height of today's wide receivers in man-to-man coverage. He has precise footwork

in backpedaling and breaking while maintaining a close eye on the receiver and the ball.

With his long strides, Luke has the ability to stay with the receiver all the way downfield to deflect the ball. Luke is not the most physical player, but if he puts on 15 more pounds without losing quickness he could be a standout.



Gonzaga College High School

DEVIN BUTLER

CORNERBACK

6'1" • 179

*Gonzaga College High School
Washington, D.C.*

Devin Butler is a four-star recruit from Gonzaga High School in Washington D.C.

Butler will play cornerback at Notre Dame, though he saw time as a receiver in high school. Butler is an instinctive player with great closing speed and lots of range.

He is speedy and can track down receivers or runners across the field. Butler provides solid, smart and aware coverage while displaying the ability to make open field tackles against the run.

He reads quarterbacks well and gets a jump on the ball, and once he gets a jump on the ball, he has the ability to elevate and the hands to bring the ball in.



Roman Catholic High School

WILL FULLER

RECEIVER

6'1" • 163

*Roman Catholic High School
Philadelphia*

Will Fuller tore up the gridiron at Roman Catholic High School, located in Philadelphia. The 6-foot-1, 170-pound receiver and cornerback posted 46 receptions for 758 yards and scored 13 touchdowns in addition to the

three interceptions he had on the defensive side of the ball in his senior year.

Fuller also broke the city record for most receiving yards in a single game, a mark that stood for over 40 years, when he recorded 276 yards on 10 receptions. After his impressive senior campaign, he was named first team all-Catholic wide receiver and defensive back, and he is the top-ranked receiver in southeast Pennsylvania.

Originally a Penn State commit, Fuller switched his commitment to Notre Dame in August after the NCAA handed down its sanctions against Penn State. With Fuller, the Irish get a fast and agile wide receiver who excels in the open field. Fuller also runs crisp routes and has good hands.



San Antonio Christian

COREY ROBINSON

RECEIVER

6'5" • 200

*San Antonio Christian
San Antonio*

With his pedigree, it's no surprise Corey Robinson has tremendous athletic ability.

The son of Hall of Fame basketball player David Robinson, Corey has only been playing football for three years, but in his senior year he caught 20 touchdowns in 11 games and averaged over 20 yards per catch.

With relatively little experience, Robinson is a raw player with great potential and lots of room to grow. Still, his route running is solid, and he already has the athleticism and aggressiveness to consistently win jump balls. Robinson also has good hands and is particularly dangerous in traffic in the middle of the field. At 6-foot-5 and 200 pounds, Robinson can dominate smaller cornerbacks and will be one of the tallest Irish receivers.



Michael Murray Photography

JAMES ONWUALU

RECEIVER

6'1" • 203

*Cretin-Derham Hall High School
Saint Paul, Minn.*

Receiver James Onwualu doesn't break out of many tackles — generally because defenders can't catch him in the first place. The nimble Cretin-Derham Hall product from Saint Paul, Minn., has made many of his opponents look foolish over the years, tormenting them with fantastic foot speed and outstanding lateral movement.

Onwualu — who hails from the same school as Michael Floyd and Joe Mauer — carries the ball with the momentum of a freight train, staying cognizant of where the defense is and where to go to avoid it. Hesitation has no place in his game; he can run his route, turn for the catch and break for the end zone, all without losing a step. He received offers from nearly every Big Ten school and several Pac-12 programs in addition to Notre Dame.



Belton High School

DURHAM SMYTHE

TIGHT END

6'5" • 230

*Belton High School
Belton, Texas*

Durham Smythe is a tight end out of Belton High School in Belton, Texas. At 6-foot-5 and 230 pounds, Smythe's frame gives him an advantage over smaller defenders. Besides having the ability to reach passes defenders can't get to, Smythe doesn't need as much separation to get open compared to smaller tight ends and receivers. He can line up as a blocker or split out as a receiver, although he seems more comfortable lined up tight

with a hand on the ground.

Most importantly, Smythe possesses soft hands and a commitment to blocking. His blocks impress just as much as his acrobatic catches. Along with fellow recruit Mike Heuerman, Smythe looks to come in and provide even more depth to an already strong tight end corps.



William Penn Charter School

MIKE MCGLINCHEY

OFFENSIVE LINEMAN

6'8" • 285

*William Penn Charter School
Philadelphia*

McGlinchey, the cousin of NFL quarterback Matt Ryan, will provide the Irish with a unique combination of size and strength on the offensive line. With his 6-foot-8-inch frame, McGlinchey towers over defensive linemen but still has the agility and athleticism to seal off blocks and follow plays down field.

The Philadelphia prospect's combination of power and explosive ability off the ball will allow him to contribute for the Irish in the future, and his height is a unique factor that will give him an advantage even at the college level.

McGlinchey played in the Semper Fidelis All-American Bowl in January along with Notre Dame commitments such as quarterback Malik Zaire and receiver Will Fuller.



Bishop Hartley High School

JACOB MATUSKA

DEFENSIVE END

6'4" • 235

*Bishop Hartley High School
Columbus, Ohio*

Jacob Matuska played both tight end and defensive end in high school and with his big frame could be placed at either position for Notre Dame.

Matuska, however, will likely line up on defense for the Irish.

The second member of the class to commit behind offensive lineman Steve Elmer, Matuska pledged to the Irish on March 7, 2012.

Though lacking great speed for a tight end, Matuska's size makes him difficult to cover. Matuska averaged 21.75 yards per catch his senior season and hauled in four touchdowns. His biggest strength as a tight end may be his run blocking due to his size and good technique.

Defensively, he racked up 49 tackles and three interceptions in 2012. Matuska likely will provide depth for the Irish as a freshman and not make an immediate big impact as he adjusts to the college game.



American Heritage High School

MICHAEL DEEB

LINEBACKER

6'2" • 238

*American Heritage High School
Plantation, Fla.*

Although not one of the most heralded recruits in the upcoming class, Michael Deeb may have the potential to be one of its best players down the road. Deeb lives up to his reputation as a hard-nosed, intelligent inside linebacker, often blowing up plays in the backfield with ferocious hits.

His power stands out the most, as he stops running backs with immediate contact and offensive linemen struggle to move him out of the hole. And while speed is not his forte, he certainly shows the ability to be a sideline-to-sideline playmaker.

One area where he may need improvement is in pass coverage, where, like most young linebackers, he struggles to cover quicker running backs and receivers.



Absegami High School

RASHAD KINLAW

CORNERBACK

6'0" • 180

*Absegami High School
Galloway, N.J.*

Rashad Kinlaw is listed as an athlete by ESPN, but he projects as a cornerback at Notre Dame.

Coming off his high school career as a dual threat quarterback, Kinlaw provides Notre Dame with several options at the next level with his explosive speed and versatility. His speed produces damage on the field.

At 6-feet and 180 pounds with incredible agility, Kinlaw is extremely difficult to tackle in the open field. He has proven to be a very versatile player and profiles nicely as a cornerback given his speed and mechanics.

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Recruits adopt 'Mob' mentality



Photo courtesy of Gonzaga College High School

Cornerback Devin Butler, a signee in Notre Dame's 2013 class, was one of the creators of the "Irish Mob." Notre Dame signed 24 players Wednesday.

By CHRIS ALLEN
Sports Editor

The 24 incoming players who make up the Irish class of 2013 hail from as far east as Massachusetts and as far west as California.

But despite being separated by distance, the group has been united for months under one defining moniker.

"The 'Irish Mob,'" cornerback Devin Butler, who signed Wednesday, said. "It [started] way back when it was only 11 commits. I was just talking to [quarterback] Malik Zaire and [wide receiver] James Onwualu about how we 'mob,' slang for like playing well. They both said, 'We are the Irish Mob,' and we ran with it.

"It helps to keep us close because it's just a way to unite us and keep us all together without being together."

Though it started off as a moniker, the "Irish Mob" became a movement that brought together arguably the best recruiting class in recent Notre Dame history. Through the use of the hashtag #IrishMob13 on Twitter, natural leaders Onwualu, Butler and offensive lineman Steve Elmer were able to bring new and talented recruits to play for the Irish.

Irish recruiting analyst Mike Frank said the group is already showing the ability to lead at a young age.

"The closeness of the group has a huge impact," he said. "That's your future leadership at some point. Having those guys so close and having them get along with each other, it's good because when the game's on the line they don't want to let their brother down. That's where it really comes into play."

As the 2012 Irish continued to pile up wins on the field, the "Irish Mob" continued to grow off it. The class gained momentum from the commitments of five-star caliber players in running

back Greg Bryant and safety Max Redfield in the weeks and days leading up to the BCS National Championship Game on Jan. 7. Frank said a distinguishing factor of the group was its willingness to compete against players who play the same position. Bryant, running back Tarean Folston and tight end Durham Smythe all joined the "Mob" late despite facing crowded position battles.

"The way this class operates is, we're all here to compete and we're all here to play, but whatever is going to make the team better is what we need," Frank said. "It's a kind of unselfishness. I'm really excited to see that."

The unity of the "Mob" was tested on Jan. 10 as highly-regarded linebacker Alex Anzalone, scheduled to enroll early at Notre Dame, de-committed to enroll early at Florida.

The Irish recruits reacted in an uproar at Anzalone, heavily criticizing his decision. Frank said the fire with which the players reacted is a sign of future team unity.

"When Alex Anzalone decommitted, a lot of guys that he knew felt pretty betrayed by that. That was encouraging to see, they took that very personally," Frank said. "That to me was a good sign that you've got the right kind of guys coming in this class, the right kind of mentality that you're looking for. Guys that take this seriously, personally and want to be part of not just a team but a family-type atmosphere. They took that as a discretion against the family almost, which I thought was a really encouraging sign."

Through the work of Zaire, Onwualu, Butler and others, it has become clear that fall camp will be more than just an assembly of new faces — it will be the reunion of a family.

A family called the "Irish Mob."

Contact Chris Allen at
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Expert lauds incoming recruiting class

By **CHRIS ALLEN**
Sports Editor

Notre Dame built on its landmark 2012 season Wednesday as it received the National Letters of Intent for 24 recruits making up its 2013 recruiting class. The group includes nine members of the elite ESPN150 and is ranked as the No. 4 class in the country by ESPN, trailing only Florida, Ohio State and Alabama.

Irish recruiting expert Mike Frank lauded the Notre Dame coaching staff for its efforts in landing its best class in recent memory.

"My overall opinion is I think it's a very, very good class. I think they filled their needs at almost every position with maybe a few exceptions," said Frank, who runs the ESPN-affiliated Irish Sports Daily. "I love the talent in this class. They did a great job getting some talented guys, some guys who can come in and help right away, which is important. There are some guys who can match talent with the very best teams in the country. You're starting to land the kind of players that Alabama can get, and when you do that you're really raising the talent level in the program."

Headlining the class is linebacker Jaylon Smith, who will come to campus as the most-hyped player Notre Dame has attracted since former linebacker Manti Te'o. A local prospect, Smith hails from Fort Wayne, Ind., and is the No. 7 player in the country according to ESPN's evaluation team. The widely

acclaimed five-star player checks in at 6-foot-3 and 212 pounds with the speed and size to contribute at either of Notre Dame's outside linebacker positions.

"Certainly Jaylon Smith is a once-in-a-decade, once-in-a-generation type player," Frank said. "He's just a guy who can do a lot of things for a guy his size. It's just very, very rare to have that combination of size and speed. He also has really good instincts."

Frank said Smith has the potential to contribute as a leader in a similar vein as Te'o.

"I think he'll have a similar impact to what [former Notre Dame linebacker] Manti Te'o did. When you talk about him as a person, he's just a truly great kid," Frank said. "He's got his head screwed on straight, he's extremely well-liked and he cares about his community. When you talk about talent, people find this hard to believe but I think Jaylon has more talent than Manti Te'o ever had. He's easily just as big as Manti but he's quicker and faster."

Smith is not the only blue-chip prospect to join the Irish defensive unit next fall. Notre Dame received a late signing from No. 10 overall prospect Eddie Vanderdoes, the nation's top defensive tackle. Vanderdoes projects to be able to play any position on the defensive line in Notre Dame's 3-4 defense. Frank said Vanderdoes, who was once committed to USC but warmed up to the Irish after the 12-0 regular season in 2012, is a prospect of top caliber.

"Jaylon Smith is a great player, but to me Eddie Vanderdoes is just the crown jewel of this class," Frank said. "I know a guy from out where Eddie is from in California who has been covering recruiting out there and he said Eddie is the best guy he's seen at his position in 10 or 15 years. ... I'm really thrilled, to be honest."

Joining Smith and Vanderdoes in the front seven next fall are a quartet of physical prospects. ESPN150 outside linebacker Doug Randolph, inside linebacker Michael Deeb, defensive end Jacob Matuska and ESPN150 defensive end Isaac Rochell will all suit up for defensive coordinator Bob Diaco's vaunted unit next season.

After spending the 2012 season with a number of converted players from other positions in the secondary due to recruiting defections and injuries, the Notre Dame staff will be happy to welcome a stellar group of four natural defensive backs to campus in the fall. Highly sought-after safety and former USC commit Max Redfield from Mission Viejo, Calif., is the centerpiece of a group that includes a trio of cornerbacks — Cole Luke, Devin Butler and Rashad Kinlaw.

"You're welcoming just a bunch of good players in the secondary. I think Max Redfield is a tremendous player," Frank said. "He allows you to do a lot of things defensively. Notre Dame likes to play with a single safety playing up high in some situations and he allows you to do that. In order to do



Courtesy of American Heritage School

Running back Greg Bryant from Delray Beach, Fla., will enroll at Notre Dame in the fall. Bryant was one of 24 recruits to sign Wednesday.

that you need a guy who can run and run well, and also be physical back there. He can do that. He's a big safety prospect. They can do things with coverage and confuse opposing quarterbacks."

On the offensive side of the ball, the immediate impact from the 2013 class could come from the running back position. A pair of ESPN150 running backs from Florida will compete to line up in the Irish backfield next season to replace departed backs Theo Riddick and Cierre Wood. Frank said both players have the talent to contribute right away.

"I love the two running backs in this class. Greg Bryant's got as much or more talent than any back they've signed in quite some time," he said. "I'll say the same for Tarean Folston, he's got a tremendous amount of talent and potential. He just needs to get a little bit bigger and a little bit stronger, but once he does, he's a guy who can hit the home run and get some big plays. That's something Notre Dame has been missing for a while from the running back position for a long time."

Bryant or Folston may one day line up behind the latest dual-threat quarterback to hit Notre Dame's campus. Four-star quarterback Malik Zaire brings electricity to the signal-caller spot and, Frank said, possesses some similarities to junior quarterback Everett Golson.

"I think he's quicker than Everett and maybe a little bit faster in terms of top-end speed. Where Malik is really going to shine is I think he's a great projected leader. People really gravitate to him, his mentality is one where he can become a great leader for this team."

Rounding out the offensive class are great numbers at the receiver, tight end and offensive line positions. Though Notre Dame did not ink a five-star prospect at these spots, they will welcome great

depth in signing five offensive linemen, four receivers and two tight ends to the 2013 roster.

A pair of famous names will line up at wideout, as among the Irish signees are Corey Robinson and Torii Hunter Jr., sons of Hall of Fame basketball center David Robinson and current Detroit Tigers outfielder Torii Hunter, respectively.

Frank said he is particularly impressed with the group of linemen signed to compete under coach Harry Hiestand in the trenches.

"I think they got five guys who can really pan out and become great players for Notre Dame," Frank said. "It wouldn't surprise me if all five end up starting at some point down the road."

Now that the curtain has fallen on the 2013 recruiting season, Frank said the class of 24 recruits showed Notre Dame's continued momentum to the top of college football.

"It's great to see Notre Dame competing with Alabama for some of the top guys and top classes in the country. I think the next step for Brian Kelly and his staff is to capitalize on the 2012 season in recruiting, into the 2014 stretch. They need to get a few more of the five-star guys, guys like Max Redfield, Greg Bryant, Jaylon Smith, those are the difference-makers. Those are the people who make the key plays in the game that decide the outcome of the game. What's really the difference is if you get a couple more guys who are five-star type players ... you have a chance to hang with anybody."

For more on Notre Dame recruiting, check out Mike Frank's irishsportsdaily.com.

Email Mike at mikefrank18@sbcglobal.net and tell him *The Observer* sent you.

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Louis M. Nanni is the vice president for University Relations at the University of Notre Dame. In this role, he oversees the University's efforts in development, advisory councils, special events and the Notre Dame Alumni Association. Mr. Nanni graduated from Notre Dame in 1984 with a bachelor's degree in government and the Program of Liberal Studies.

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