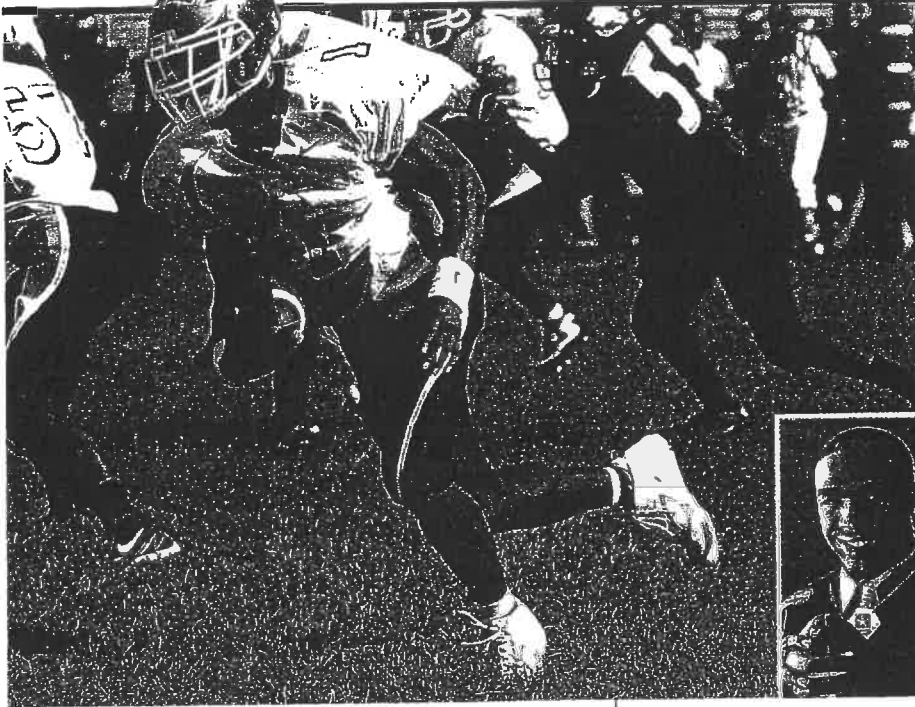


Inside College Football

by Mark Beech

SI.com/football/college



out at places like USC, Michigan and Oklahoma, that approach is a tough sell to today's recruits. "Elite players want to know they can make an impact as freshmen," says Allen Wallace of *SuperPrep* and *scout.com*. "Penn State's been trying to sign these kids for years. Now [the Nittany Lions] have to show them that what's happening in Los Angeles can happen in Happy Valley."

Says Paterno, "It was pretty easy for us to say, 'Look, we've got a pretty solid football team. We have everything but a few playmakers. It's an opportunity for you to come in and help us get back to the top.'"

The jewel of this year's class is Williams, considered by some experts to be the nation's top recruit. A 6' 1", 185-pound flier from Roosevelt High, in Greenbelt, Md., he's a Reggie Bush type who rolled up more than 3,000 all-purpose yards as a senior.



HAPPY CAMPER Williams has already enrolled in expectation of significant playing time in '05.

Bradley, "[but] if a kid has been loyal to Joe, and everything else is even, then Joe has given the nod to the kid who's been with the program for a while."

But with freshmen busting

King, a two-way star at Pittsburgh's Gateway High, rushed for 1,901 yards and 30 touchdowns last fall. Both graduated early and are enrolled at Penn State this semester, and their presence has already made a difference: In a signing-day surprise, Jerome Hayes of Bayonne, N.J., a top 20 prospect at line-

Altered State

Penn State got with the program on signing day, adding two playmakers who'll provide an instant spark

MOST POWERHOUSE programs would have little reason to celebrate a recruiting class that experts ranked no better than 19th in the nation. But at Penn State, which is coming off its fourth losing season in five years, there's more to this year's class than its ranking. That's because coach Joe Paterno's 19 signees include two of the nation's top prospects, wide receiver Derrick Williams and cornerback Justin King—speedy playmakers who should add desperately needed punch to the Nittany Lions' offense (104th out of 117 Division I-A schools in '04) and special teams. "There isn't as much balance, but I think we helped ourselves where we had

to help ourselves," says Paterno, 78. "We've had these kinds of players in the past, but we just fell a little short in finding them the last couple of years."

Penn State's lack of game-breaking talent was especially apparent last season, when the offense's ineptitude negated the efforts of a stellar defensive unit that allowed the fifth-fewest points in the nation. As the team stumbled to a 4-7 finish, Paterno's detractors pressed their criticism of his recruiting approach, which had emphasized getting early commitments from prospects, then sitting them for at least a year after they arrived. "Joe's always going to play the better kid," says defensive coordinator Tom

Sudden Impact

In addition to Penn State's Derrick Williams and Justin King, these five signees could make immediate marks next fall

KEVIN GRADY, RB, Michigan

Already enrolled, the all-time Michigan state high school rushing leader (8,431 yards) practiced with the Wolverines during Rose Bowl week.

MARLON LUCKY, RB, Nebraska

The North Hollywood, Calif., product, who turned down USC, could become the best Cornhuskers back since Ahman Green.

EUGENE MONROE, T, Virginia

Offensive linemen frequently redshirt to bulk up, but the 6' 6" 318-pounder from South Plainfield, N.J., already has an NFL body.

MELVIN ALAEZE, DE, Maryland

At Randallstown (Md.) High the 6' 2" 280-pounder also saw time at defensive tackle, tight end, fullback, tailback and punter.

RYAN PERRILLOUX, QB, LSU

He doesn't lack confidence. "I could definitely be a Heisman winner next year," the brash Louisianan told USA Today, "or at least a candidate."

CHRISTOPHER ANGELO/THE GAZETTE; MICHAEL J. LEIBERTH/ILLUSTRATED PHOTOGRAPHY (LEFT)

backer, announced he was headed to Happy Valley.

The 2005 season looks promising for the Nittany Lions if JoePa turns loose his freshmen. "One of the good things about the cottage industry of recruiting is that the kids get so much exposure that they're not blindsided by all the attention they get as freshmen," Paterno says. He also thinks they arrive game-ready. "I mean, they can read a two-deep zone. They're just much more competent than they used to be, and they have a lot more poise. It won't be all Greek to them."

IOWA

Ferentz Builds A Following

Perhaps the most surprising recruiting development took place at Iowa, where coach Kirk Ferentz and his staff put together the first top 10 recruiting class in school history. The Hawkeyes



FOLLOW ME Christensen committed to Iowa early, then helped lure other top players.

signed five Chicago-area players ranked among the top 10 in the country at their respective positions. Quarterback Jake Christensen (6' 1", 205 pounds; Lockport, Ill.) was the first to announce his intentions, last summer, and he was followed last month at the U.S. Army All-American Bowl by tight end Anthony Moeaki (6' 4", 235; Wheaton), defensive end Ryan Bain (6' 2", 260, Bolingbrook) and offensive tackles Dan Doering (6' 7", 290; Barrington) and Dace Richardson (6' 6", 300; Wheaton). "They all helped re-

cruit each other," says Eric Johnson, Iowa's tight ends coach and recruiting coordinator. "Jake had as much impact as anybody. He wanted to find guys who could block for him."

In his first three seasons in Iowa City, Ferentz had a combined record of 11-24. But over the last three years Iowa has gone 31-7, shared two Big Ten championships and finished No. 8 in the AP poll each season. The Hawkeyes have won two straight January postseason games, including last month's thrilling last-second victory over LSU in the Capital One Bowl. Impressively, Ferentz has done all that without ever landing a recruiting class that was ranked higher than 35th by *SuperPrep*. "Six years ago we weren't able to grab the interest of top prospects," Ferentz says. "Recruiting is certainly critical, but overall our focus has always been on the guys we've had on campus."

Few college coaches are better at developing talent than Ferentz, especially along the offensive line. Instead of blue-chip prospects, the coach has gone after "football players"—by his definition, kids who are tough, smart and self-motivated. Under his tutelage such lightly touted prospects as tight end Dallas Clark and tackle Robert Gallery blossomed into All-Americans and first-round NFL draft picks. Indeed, five Hawkeyes have been snapped up in each of the last two drafts. Aside from wins and championships, there may be no statistic more important to a recruit. "Almost every senior starter we've had in the last two years has had an opportunity to play pro football," says Johnson.

Though this year's recruiting class may be longer on talent than usual, the coach insists they're all his kind of guys. "Players of our personality tend to gravitate toward this program," says Ferentz. "They're all willing to do what it takes to get better. I don't think any of these kids picked Iowa because they liked our helmets best." □

Recruiting Report Card

WINNERS

NEBRASKA ASSISTANT JOHN BLAKE

The former Oklahoma head coach signed eight of the Huskers' 31 recruits, including highly touted California RB Marlon Lucky (right), helping to give Nebraska its best class in years.



FIRST-YEAR COACHES URBAN MEYER AND LES MILES

On short notice, Meyer landed a solid class at Florida with standouts from across the country. LSU newcomer Miles scored big when dual-threat QB Ryan Perrilloux chose the Tigers over Texas, to whom he had verbally committed.

TENNESSEE

Scout.com's No. 1 class includes players from 11 states and D.C. The momentum already has carried over to next year; last Thursday, DE Lee Smith of Knoxville committed for '06.

USC

As if they needed help, the Trojans signed standout QB Mark Sanchez of Mission Viejo, Calif., and plucked the best player out of Tennessee, consensus top five WR Patrick Turner.

FLORIDA STATE

A flood of late signees led by WR Fred Rouse and top five RB Antone Smith, both in-state pickups, helped the Seminoles outrecreate rival Miami for the first time in years.

LOSERS

FIRST-YEAR COACHES RON ZOOK AND TYRONE WILLINGHAM

A dynamic recruiter at Florida, Zook didn't have nearly that success with his first class at Illinois (ranked as low as 51st by the experts). Willingham, who had trouble bringing in talent at Notre Dame before taking the Washington job, lost out on several of the state's best, including RB Jonathan Stewart (above), who chose Oregon.



MIAMI

The 'Canes failed to sign a skill player on offense despite their pursuit of Florida RB Antone Smith and California QB Derek Shaw. They enter '05 with two scholarship QBs (zero starts).

NOTRE DAME

A late-arriving new coaching staff handcuffed the Irish, whose class generally ranked outside the top 30. They lost top Ohio DL Lawrence Wilson to Ohio State and New Jersey OL Brian Roche to Louisville.

TEXAS

The Longhorns missed out on three top targets—TE Martellus Bennett, QB Ryan Perrilloux and WR Fred Rouse—and signed only one QB (from a small school) after coach Mack Brown said he needed two "great ones."
—Gene Menez

More recruiting news and analysis at SI.com/football/college.

8-20

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Altered State

1. How is Penn State's recruiting class ranked?
A.) 21 B.) 19 C.) 30 D.) 11

2. Who is Penn State's top recruit?
A.) Kevin Grady B.) Marlow Lucky C.) Derrick Williams D.) Joe Paterno

3. In high school Justin King rushed for 2,000 yards and 20 TD's.
A.) True B.) False

4. Williams and King both hope to start for Penn State as freshman.
A.) True B.) False

5. How many yards did Kevin Grady rush for in High School?
A.) 8,431 B.) 9,543 C.) 7,586 D.) 8,279

6. What is Iowa's football record in the last three years?
A.) 11-24 B.) 15-18 C.) 31-7 D.) 25-8

7. What school had their first Top 10 recruiting class in history?
A.) Penn State B.) Texas C.) Notre Dame D.) Iowa

8. Which team had a bad recruiting class?
A.) Texas B.) Miami C.) Notre Dame D.) all

9. What school did Marlow Lucky sign with?
A.) Michigan B.) Nebraska C.) Penn State D.) LSU

10. Who is the Quarterback that Iowa signed?
A.) Jake Christensen B.) Ryan Perrilloux C.) Joe Brooks D.) Kevin Grady