

Solich chooses wisely

Man for man, the Nebraska football recruiting class of 2001 is just as good as any in the country.



Sean Callahan

This class does exactly what it should - fills the needs at major positions.

The main need coming in was finding a top-notch quarterback.

By getting a pair of commitments from Millard North's Mike McLaughlin and Council Bluffs St. Albert's Mike Stuntz, NU gets some needed depth at the signal caller position.

Questions remain, however, on whether either could battle for a starting spot or even surpass current backup Jammal Lord.

My guess is no. Lord will have two years on these guys already, two years of working behind one of the best.

Good news is Stuntz and McLaughlin can easily be shifted to other positions.

At 6-foot-2 and 180 pounds, Stuntz would make a great safety with his 4.5 speed. The same goes for McLaughlin. He could be utilized in the defensive backfield or even at receiver.

Nevertheless, one thing's for sure - both players will definitely have a shot to make it as a quarterback.

The two quarterback signees are far from being the only interchangeable parts in this class.

With eight signees that played either cornerback or safety in high school, NU has plenty of speed to burn. And the coaching staff will likely burn it both in the defensive secondary or the split end and wingback positions.

Probably the best of the athletic bunch is Denver standout Cory Ross, Colorado's player of the year and the highest-ranked defensive back in NU's class.

While Ross will probably start out at cornerback, he has the speed and versatility to help NU anywhere on the field. Listed at 5-foot-7, Ross may be short in stature, but he's long on talent. This is the player who split time with Colorado's Marcus Houston, a sure star in the making.

While athletes were a priority for the Huskers, the strongest point of this class is at defensive tackle where NU failed to sign any in the class of 2000.

In 1999, Nebraska signed Patrick Kabongo, Junior Tagoa'i and Ryon Bingham. So far, all three haven't produced in their young careers, or they haven't stayed healthy. There is talk that Tagoa'i and Kabongo may even be moved to offensive line this spring.

By signing Jared Helming, Titus Adams and LeKevin Smith in this year's class, the Huskers picked up three players capable of eventually becoming stars at the position.

This is probably the best group of defensive tackles Nebraska has ever landed in one class, considering the fact that all three players are ranked among the top 15 at their position by rivals100.com.

The recruiting season did have its disappointments, however.

Like every year, Nebraska lost a few guys who played the recruiting soap opera.

Last year it was Carlyle Holiday and Adrian Mayes. This year Barrington, Ill., offensive lineman Dan Stevenson gave his commitment to the Huskers but decided to back out after his official visit because he said he just didn't "mesh" with the guys on the team.

Probably the biggest disappointment came when East St. Louis running back Damian Nash committed to Missouri over NU.

At one time, Nash looked to be a lock for Nebraska, but after visiting Missouri for his final trip, first-year Tiger Coach Gary Pinkel must have said something right to sway Nash from the Huskers.

Maybe the only other major disappointment was losing out on Atlantic, Iowa, offensive lineman Blake Larsen to Iowa.

Larsen, rated as the top player at his position according to

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On the dotted line, please...

Solich signs 18 future Huskers in his third recruiting class

BY SEAN CALLAHAN

National letter of intent signing day has come and gone, and in the wake of months of recruiting, Nebraska Coach Frank Solich said he was pleased with what he came up with.

On Wednesday, Solich welcomed 18 new recruits that signed national letters of intent to join the 2001 Nebraska football team.

"We really feel it's an excellent class - exceptional in terms of the speed, the size, the athleticism and the toughness that is combined within this class," Solich said. "Those are all things that we really look very hard at in the recruiting process to try to make sure we're bringing in the kind of athletes that are going to be able to compete for championships."

Of the 18 signees, two players - Macon, Ga., defensive tackle LeKevin Smith and Davenport, Iowa, running back Marques Simmons - announced their decisions to commit to Nebraska on signing day, opting not to reveal their choices before then. Really, Solich's class is broken

up into three categories - quarterbacks, defensive tackles and skill-position athletes. Only three of the 18 recruits don't fit in at those areas.

Since NU didn't receive any commitments from defensive tackles or quarterbacks in its last recruiting class, Solich said those were two of the main targets in this year's recruiting process.

But it was obvious by looking at the list of newcomers that defense was what NU coaches were looking for mostly as two-thirds of the class were defensive specialists.

That's what wins championships, Solich said.

"If you looked at the Super Bowl, if you looked at the Big 12 Championship game, if you looked at the national championship game, you saw great defense played," Solich said. "Certainly what we're going with bringing in the type of players we're bring in is insuring that Nebraska will continue a great tradition of defensive football teams."

By gaining a late commitment from Smith at defensive tackle along with Omaha

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Frank Solich
NU football coach

Creighton Prep's Titus Adams, Springfield (Mo.) Kickapoo's Jared Helming and Laurel-Concord's Seppo Ewwaraye, NU's bagged four lineman, three of which are ranked in the top 15 at their position by rivals100.com.

Solich called the incoming group the best at that position he can remember in 22 years with the Huskers.

"I can't remember a better group of defensive linemen in terms of combination of size, speed and guys who have made plays," Solich said.

Jeremy Crabtree, rivals100.com editor, said the commitment of Smith brings the

Nebraska 2001 Football Signees

Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Hometown
Titus Adams	DL	6-4	285	Omaha, Neb.
Philip Bland	Rover	6-0	205	Lafayette, Colo.
Clifford Brye	WR/Athlete	5-10	175	Lincoln, Neb.
Daniel Bullocks	FS	6-2	200	Chattanooga, Tenn.
Josh Bullocks	Rover	6-2	200	Chattanooga, Tenn.
Seppo Ewwaraye	DL	6-5	325	Laurel, Neb.
Antwon Guidry	CB	6-1	185	Campbell, Calif.
Jared Helming	DL	6-4	275	Springfield, Mo.
Richie Incognito	OL	6-4	310	Glendale, Ariz.
Randy Lindingham	CB	6-1	180	Sonora, Calif.
Daniel Manning	CB	6-0	195	Corsicana, Texas
Mike McLaughlin	QB	6-0	175	Omaha, Neb.
Gary Pike	OL	6-4	280	Pueblo, Colo.
Cory Ross	RB/Athlete	5-7	190	Denver, Colo.
Barrett Ruud	LB	6-2	220	Lincoln, Neb.
Marques Simmons	RB	5-10	190	Davenport, Iowa
LeKevin Smith	DL	6-3	295	Macon, Ga.
Mike Stuntz	QB	6-2	185	Council Bluffs, Iowa

Jerry Morgan/DN

class over the top.

"Smith gives Nebraska a great one-two punch with Helming," Crabtree said. "They instantly give NU one of the top overall defensive line classes in the nation along with Adams."

"Smith is the type of player you have to like. He's big, strong and aggressive off the ball."

When one looks at a list of the recruits, it's hard not to notice the large number of defensive backs, too.

Overall, six of the players are listed to play in the secondary. Four others have the ability to play there, as well.

Please see RECRUITS on 10



David Clasen/DN

Cookie Belcher leans in for a shot over Oklahoma State forward Andre Williams. Belcher tied career highs in NU's 78-75 win, scoring 27 points and notching eight steals.

Belcher lifts NU in overtime win

BY BRIAN CHRISTOPHERSON

Cookie Belcher is turning it up just as his career is winding down.

The senior guard popped in a game-high 27 points against Oklahoma State, tying his career high. Each one of them was necessary to help the Cornhuskers (11-11, 4-5) fend off OSU (14-5, 5-3) for a 78-75 overtime win before 8,814 fans at the

Bob Devaney Sports Center.

It was the third time in the last four games Belcher has poured in more than 20 points.

The senior from Mexico, Mo., took over the game at times, with his most impressive stint coming as he put on a three-point shooting clinic at the end of the first half. Belcher hit three triples in a row, sparking a 12-0 Nebraska run and giving NU a 40-33 halftime lead.

"I don't know what happened,"

Belcher said. "Something hit me, and my shot just felt good. Every time I touched it, I just wanted to shoot it, and I did, and we got on a roll."

Belcher tied a career high with eight steals, was nine of 13 shooting for the game and four of five from behind the arc. He helped the Huskers shoot 49 percent from the field compared to OSU's 41 percent shooting.

Please see BELCHER on 11

Prep's Adams knew he'd be a Cornhusker

BY DAVID DIEHL

It's 8 a.m. sharp inside the Creighton meeting room at Creighton Prep High School, but it's really not the Creighton room right now. It's the Titus Adams room.

With a deft sweeping motion, Adams affixes his intent to play football at Nebraska. His parents, coaches and a few teammates look on as he lays down the pen, looks up and smiles. He is a Cornhusker.

"It's just an honor to be able to play football at Nebraska," Adams said. "It's just always what I wanted to do."

Adams, a 6-foot-4, 285-pound defensive tackle, was one of 18 high school athletes to sign national letters of intent to play football for Nebraska Coach Frank Solich on Wednesday. He is also part of a trio of highly skilled defensive tackles who signed with NU, allowing for optimism in the Blackshirts' future.

One of two Parade All-Americans in the group of three tackles, Adams was arguably the best player in the state this year. He anchored a Creighton Prep defense that helped put the Junior Jays in the state championship game for the second year in a row.

Last season, Nebraska lost out on the top player in the state as Omaha Central's standout running back, JaMaine Billups, opted for Iowa State and the immediate playing opportunities available with the Cyclones.

But Adams admitted that keeping the state's top player inside its borders wasn't all that difficult this recruiting season. He sort of went through the motions of the recruiting process knowing full well where he was going to end up.

"I pretty much always kind of knew," Adams said of his choice. "I wanted to go to Nebraska; I just wanted to go through the whole process of recruiting and see who was interested."

Please see TITUS on 10

Sooners deliver double-digit knockout to NU

BY JOHN GASKINS

To grasp the story of the Nebraska women's basketball team's 84-62 blowout loss to No. 10 Oklahoma Wednesday night, just dig out any article about the team from the last month.

Because it was the same old story for the Huskers, which dropped to 10-13. A broken record. They lost for the ninth time in 11 games during their Big 12 stretch. Six of those losses came by 14 points or more. Four of them came at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. This time, it was in front of 4,794 frustrated fans who stuck around after the men's overtime win over Oklahoma State.

Once again on Wednesday, NU played stiff

Oklahoma 84
Nebraska 62

Please see WOMEN on 11