

Recruiting Class Strength Is Overrated

Written by {ga=furls}

Monday, February 12 2007 7:00 PM -

Fresh off his move from Columbus, OH to Charleston, SC ... where he will train how to commandeer a nuclear sub for the U.S. Navy ... Furls checks in with his latest. And in it, he debunks the recruiting class rankings that we've been seeing all over the web for the last month.

Furls has seen too many 5* guys like Justin Zwick and Mike D'Andrea bust and too many 2* and 3* guys like A.J. Hawk and Troy Smith excel to puch much credence in these rankings. A solid back in the saddle column from the steady Furls.



Recruiting class strength. That has been the only topic in college football since Florida pounded the Buckeyes in the desert, but what is it really? To me it is some type of nebulous idea that we are force fed by any pundit with a platform to preach. Think about it, what is a good recruiting class? Is it the team that accumulates the most acorns, the shiniest acorns, or the best tasting acorns for its particular situation? The whole thing sounds a little squirrely to me.

Now if we were dealing with acorns or some other measurable commodity, this system could actually work, but we are not. We are dealing with eighteen-year old kids. Do you remember what it was like to be eighteen? Each of these recruits are ranked by some insane (and equally nebulous) system and given the appropriate number of all-mighty "stars." Remember, this is the same system that projected Justin Zwick as the next Joe Germaine and Troy Smith as the next Stanley Jackson.

The annals of college football are littered with Mike D'Andreas and the Justin Zwicks; five star guys that never quite made it. I would gamble that there is nearly an equal number of unheralded guys that come out of nowhere to be superstars; the A.J. Hawks and Troy Smiths of the world. All this begs the question, what do these scouts really know?

Recruiting Class Strength Is Overrated

Written by {ga=furls}

Monday, February 12 2007 7:00 PM -

Well, they know how fast a guy is, they can kind of tell how quick or elusive he is, they know how tall and heavy he is, and they may even know how strong he is. What they don't know is what really makes this kid tick. How mature is he? How hard will he work to get better? How will he react when everyone around him is as talented as he is? And often, these same pundits don't really consider whether a guy is a good fit for the team that he is going to. For instance, is a five star option quarterback a good match for Texas Tech? I would say no. How about a power I running back in Hawaii?

No, I really don't think that these rankers of high school talent and recruiting classes really consider any of this or even the current roster of the team that the recruits are going to. College football acquisitions, even more than the NFL, are about filling holes. Think about it, an NCAA roster must completely turnover every four years and each recruiting class must not only focus on this year's immediate needs but the needs of the team in three years. For instance, how much would Joe McKnight, the number 1 recruit this year at running back, have helped the Buckeyes in the next two years? I am sure he would have done a great job getting Beanie Wells cold drinks, perhaps he could have averaged seven yards per carry in trash time, hell he may have even taken some carries from Beanie, but how much would this really help the Buckeyes? Now conversely, consider the difference that Eugene Clifford could make in an Ohio State secondary that was exposed against Michigan and Florida last year. Isn't Clifford more of a "number one" prospect to Ohio State than McKnight?

Now of course there will be those that will claim that you can tell a lot about a program's momentum based on what certain highly contested recruits do, and to an extent that is true; if a program is continuously rejected by top tier recruits then there is probably a problem, but losing a couple of prospects really isn't as indicative as some pundits would have you believe. Take the highly publicized Ben Martin situation for example. Martin, a top DE recruit from Cincinnati, recently rejected an offer from Ohio State to go play for Phil Fulmer in Tennessee. Is this a statement about Ohio State, Tennessee, or Ben Martin?

One possibility is that Martin decided to sign with Tennessee after an SEC school thrashed Ohio State, but this argument does not make sense because that very same Tennessee squad was soundly defeated by a middle of the road Big Ten team. I think a more likely answer is that the 6'5", 225lb Martin looked at the Ohio State depth chart at DE and saw that he would likely be red-shirted next year and would have to compete for playing time over the next couple of years with Gholston, Rose, and Wilson.

Recruiting Class Strength Is Overrated

Written by {ga=furls}

Monday, February 12 2007 7:00 PM -

It makes sense for the athlete and after all, they are the individuals making the decision. Think about it, if your son was a top tier high school running back this year, would you advise him to go to Ohio State to play behind Chris Wells for at least the next two years? Personally, I would rather see my son play anywhere (except Ann Arbor) than ride the pine in Columbus.

Now there are those that will claim that you cannot have too much quality depth at the running back position (or any other position), but I am not sure that this really makes a lot of sense. Take USC's class this year for instance. They got the top two running back recruits in the country, doesn't having them each on the same roster devalue one or both of their relative values to USC? Don't give me the Lendale White/Reggie Bush argument. I would argue that giving the ball to Lendale White just took carries away from Reggie Bush, the better player.

By my count there are nearly 120 Division I NCAA football teams, and each of these teams will bring in 15-20 new recruits. Elementary school arithmetic tells me this would mean that each of these "experts" would have to learn about and study film on 1800-2400 recruits. Now how much film would these guys have to watch to adequately rate these players? One hour? Can you accurately assess a player with one hour of film study? Is there one hour of film study available on each of these players? I would guess that at best these scouts have only personally seen highlights on 1/3 of these players. Have you ever seen how many of their names are misspelled in scouting reports? It is more than just a couple.

If you could assess a player and the film was available, you would have to spend 1/3 of every day over the course of a year studying a player's on field exploits in order to learn about the football skills, talent, and athleticism of each player, but every high school football player must improve in order to meet the challenges of college football. That improvement is only possible with off the field intangibles like "coachability" and work ethic. These are the intangibles that take 5star recruits and make them college football busts and take 3star recruits and turns them into Heisman Trophy winners. Kind of makes you wonder how many of these players these pundits have personally interviewed and what they actually base their rankings on.

Recruiting Class Strength Is Overrated

Written by {ga=furls}

Monday, February 12 2007 7:00 PM -

I guess what I am trying to say, is think about these things independently; don't succumb to all the self-proclaimed experts and the recent "listitude" (I have not copywrited the word so feel free to use it). Lists are the tools of the lazy writer to influence the lazy reader and present opinions as facts with very little justification. Look at these rankings, do you know how they came to order them? Seriously, if I give you a list to read I am saving you the trouble of doing your own research.

In the spirit of lists and in light of recent events, I thought I would generate my own. I feel that Joe McKnight sold himself short in his recent teleconference with USC alum Reggie Bush. Personally, I could think of at least five other USC alums that I would rather talk to and I thought I would also add the first question I would ask each:

1. George Lucas: "Dude, Jar Jar Binks? What were you thinking?"
2. Neil Armstrong: "Where do astronauts crap?"
3. Aaron Boone: "Why do you suck so bad and how did you keep your job in Cleveland that long?"
4. Bret Boone: "What is it like to have a brother that sucks that bad?"
5. O.J. Simpson: "I know cash is tight for you right now, do you wanna make a few bucks and do you know Aaron Boone?"