

Seventeen sign letters committing to HSU football

ARCATA — Hours spent hiking the recruiting trail paid dividends for Humboldt State's football program Wednesday when 17 student-athletes signed National Letters of Intent to attend HSU and play for the Lumberjacks.

Sixteen incoming freshman and one junior transfer represent the beginning of Head Coach Rob Smith's first full recruiting class. Smith, who took over the program in late January of 2008, also announced Wednesday the addition of five newcomers who enrolled in HSU at the beginning of the spring semester.

"Today's signings are the culmination of a lot of hard work," Smith said. "Through this process we learned that there is clearly a great deal of talent in this state. We also learned that once we get student-athletes to visit Humboldt State, and they see the commitment to athletics and academics, it's easy to get them interested in attending."

With a clear emphasis on recruiting a majority of freshmen, Smith will take a slightly different approach considering the number of positions he needed to fill. Instead of using a redshirt season their first year on campus, many of the newcomers are expected to immediately battle for playing time.

"I believe in the redshirt process, but this year is different," Smith said. "We're still in a transition from the previous program and that provides clear opportunities for our newcomers to come in and compete for starting roles right away."

Priority No. 1 was to fill in along the offensive and defensive lines, and the inclusion of 12 linemen in the overall group of 22 indicates the staff was successful in luring talent to campus. Also included in the crop of newcomers are five defensive backs, two tailbacks, one quarterback, one linebacker and one wide receiver.

"We clearly had a need up front on both defense and offense, and we still may have more players along those positions coming in," Smith said. "Otherwise, this was a well-rounded recruiting class. We believe they have the high character and academic commitment it takes to be successful."

Following are brief sketches of the Jacks' current signees.

Joseph Casey is a 6-1, 230-pound linebacker who helped the La Habra High School team claim the Southern Section Division 6 championship last fall. Casey earned first team all-league honors following both his junior and senior seasons, and was also selected to the all-CIF first team in 2008.

Casey earned scholar-athlete honors at La Habra, posting a 3.5 grade point average. He is currently undecided on his major.

A first team all-league selection at Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland, **Kevin**

Cooper will be counted on in the defensive backfield at HSU. The 5-9, 180-pound cornerback completed the season with 42 tackles and a pair of interceptions, and plans to major in engineering at Humboldt State.

Tailback **Jordan Kennedy-Smith** joins the Jacks from Vista Murrieta High School, where he was named to the first team all-area squad in 2008. A versatile player who also played defensive back, Kennedy-Smith received his team's Elite Special Teams Award and was selected to the Southern California East/West All-Star game.

Kennedy-Smith is a first team all-academic honoree who will major in communications at Humboldt State.

Rashad Berkley received first team all-Alameda Contra Costa League honors at Berkeley High School as a defensive end last fall. The 6-3, 220-pound lineman was also honored with second team honors following his junior season.

Another defensive end coming aboard from Berkeley High School is **Owen Krebs**, a 6-2, 235-pound first team all-Alameda Contra Costa League selection. Krebs was named the program's Most Inspirational Player, and will major in International Affairs at Humboldt State.

Jerry Malvia should provide another boost to the Lumberjacks' defensive backfield at cornerback a position he excelled at during a prep career at Compton High School. Malvia, 6-0 and 180 pounds, was honored as first-team choice following the 2008 campaign. An honor roll student, he'll major in theater arts at Humboldt State.

Trevor Hash is a local recruit who played defensive back at Eureka High, where he was honored with selection to the all-Humboldt-Del Norte League first team in the fall. The 6-3, 180-pound Hash was also picked as the HDNL's Defensive Player of the Year.

Nicholas Ricciardulli, younger brother of current HSU standout Guy Ricciardulli, was picked as the Palomar League's Player of the Year following his outstanding senior season at Poway High School. The 5-9, 180-pound tailback also earned all-CIF first team, all-North County first team, all-San Diego Union-Tribune first team and all-Palomar League first team honors.

Poway's football MVP, Ricciardulli is undecided on his major.

Harbor League first-team honoree **Daniel Rios-Romero** (6-1, 295 pounds) transfers to HSU from Grossmont Junior College, where we starred for two years on the offensive line. The San Diego native was a selected San Diego High School Offensive Lineman of the Year following his final prep season of 2005.

A 2007 Academic All-American, Rios-Romero plans to major in kinesiology at Humboldt State.

Defensive end **Korey Langhals** was voted Sonoma County League Lineman of the Year after the 2008 season. The 6-4, 235-pound Langhals was also Windsor High School's football MVP. At Humboldt State he plans to major in business.

Inido League first team honoree **Garrett Edwards** is another incoming freshman that should shore up the Lumberjacks' offensive line. Edwards (6-3, 280) was also named the conference's Scholar Athlete of the Year. He intends to major in fisheries/marine biology at Humboldt State.

David Kulp is a 6-2, 295-pound offensive lineman out of Cabrillo High School in Lompoc. Kulp achieved first team all-Central Coast and first team all-Los Padres League honors last fall, and was twice named Cabrillo's Offensive Lineman of the Year.

Kulp's chosen major at Humboldt State is marine biology.

Coming to the Jacks from Glendora High School is **Cody Tescher**, a 6-3, 285-pound offensive lineman. Tescher twice was picked to the all-Sierra League team, including first team selection his senior season. He'll major in business at HSU.

C.J. Porter is the lone wide receiver among the Jacks' signees, and will come to HSU out of Concord High School. Porter amassed several postseason honors, including the Contra Costa Times' Cream of the Crop Top 20 and first team Diablo Valley Athletic League selection at both wide receiver and defensive back.

Porter is 6-0, 180 pounds, and plans to major in kinesiology at Humboldt State.

Alex Hiebert continues HSU's connection to the state of Washington, former home of both Smith and Offensive Coordinator Eric Tripp. Hiebert is a 6-1, 225-pound tight end who was a first team all-King County choice, also earning Lineman of the Year honors. He finished his senior season at Mt. Si High School in Snoqualmie with 26 receptions for 326 yards and two touchdowns.

Thomas Haney comes from Granite Bay High School, where he served as team captain. Haney (6-0, 240) was chosen to the Press Tribune's all-area squad, and was a first team choice at defensive tackle. Voted his team's defensive line MVP following the 2008 season, Haney will study special education at HSU.

Another defensive tackle signed to help shore up the Jacks' front is **John Mendoza**, who prepped at Concord High. Mendoza (6-1, 255) was a double all-Diablo Valley Athletic League choice, selected for second team honors on defense and first team honors on the offensive line.

Winner of his school's Scholar Athlete Award, Mendoza plans a double major in criminal justice and business.

Already enrolled at Humboldt State this spring are five newcomers who will participate

in the Jacks' spring practices, scheduled to begin March 2. Two sophomores and three juniors should provide an instant infusion of talent into Humboldt State's lineup at key positions.

Leading the list is sophomore **Chris Bolt**, who played for Western Washington last fall after utilizing a redshirt season in 2007. Bolt, a 6-5, 225-pound quarterback, played in seven games for the Vikings, suiting up behind senior Adam Perry.

Bolt was a prep standout at Bellingham's Lynden High School, leading the 2006 Lions to a 13-2 record and the state championship. Bolt was chosen to the class 2A all-state squad following his senior season at LHS, where he also earned honors as a punter and placekicker.

A two-sport star, Bolt was named Bellingham Herald Player of the Year and Class 2A state tournament MVP as senior in basketball, leading his team to a 25-2 record and state title.

"With Western Washington dropping its program, we were glad to have Chris join ours," Smith said. "He's a big, athletic quarterback, and we expect him to compete for a starting role along with (returners) Mike Proulx and Ben Cozad."

Elzie Gatson comes to Humboldt State from San Diego Mesa JC, where he was a first-team all-conference choice last fall at cornerback. During his prep career at Temecula Valley High School, Gatson was honored with first team all-league, all-valley and all-county selections, and was also chosen to the all-CIF second team.

Gatson plans to major in kinesiology at Humboldt State.

Brandon Hriber (6-7, 295 pounds) transfers in from Western Carolina, where he sat out the 2008 season as a redshirt. He previously excelled as an offensive lineman at Palomar Junior College, helping his team achieve a 7-3 record in 2007. Hriber earned second team All-Mission Conference accolades following his sophomore year at Palomar.

Coming from Ventura JC is junior **Dakota Holland**, who was a second team all-Western State Conference honors in 2008. The 5-11, 175-pound free safety made 60 tackles, including three for lost yardage, and was chosen as his team's Defensive Back of the Year.

A two-time all-league honoree at Moorpark High School, Holland is studying kinesiology at Humboldt State.

A 6-3, 320-pound offensive guard, **Riordan Gomez** completed his sophomore season at Santa Rosa Junior College in 2008. During his prep career at Casa Grande High School in Petaluma, Gomez was a first-team all-state selection. He is currently studying kinesiology at HSU.