

Nebraska has savored highs and suffered through lows while chasing recruits in the final days before national signing day.

2010



Owa Odighizuwa

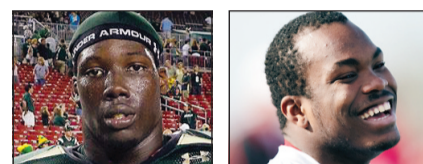
Brion Carnes

One who got away: Owamagbe Odighizuwa, UCLA. Nebraska fans envisioned the next Ndamukong Suh when they looked at Owa, from Suh's hometown of Portland, Ore. The high-profile defensive end got caught up in the hype, too, visiting NU and keeping the Huskers in consideration, along with Oregon State, until signing day. But he picked UCLA in a televised announcement and started six games as a true freshman, recording three sacks.

Final score: Brion Carnes and Corey Cooper. Last year marked the most bountiful final day in years for Nebraska as Carnes, a quarterback, and Cooper, a safety, picked the Huskers in last-minute announcements. Cooper likely rated as a bigger surprise, turning down Notre Dame and homestate Illinois, though Carnes was a definite score in his own right after pledging to Western Kentucky days earlier.

End game: Until signing day, not much happened for Nebraska in the final month as only grayshirt Bronson Marsh of Millard South pledged after Kenny Bell's commitment in early January. Is it a good sign for this year?

2009



Jason Pierre-Paul

Eric Martin

One who got away: Jason Pierre-Paul, South Florida. With receiver Brandon Kinnie in the fold out of Fort Scott (Kan.) CC, NU made a second run at teammate Pierre-Paul after pursuing the defensive end early in the 2008 season. He made a late trip to Kansas State, too, but stayed with USF on signing day and earned All-Big East recognition in his lone season before the New York Giants selected Pierre-Paul with the 15th pick in the 2010 draft.

Final score: Eric Martin. Nebraska pulled the linebacker out of Moreno Valley, Calif., away from Arizona and Arizona State. Martin visited all three schools in January and also earned offers from Boise State and Washington. He announced the pledge to NU three days before signing and has starred on special teams in two seasons.

End game: Only Martin and Cole Pensick joined the NU class after Christmas, but the Huskers went after others, like defensive tackle Sione Tuihalamaka, who landed at Arizona. NU also worked hard to keep Taylor Martinez. He received lots of late attention elsewhere but stayed committed to Nebraska, interestingly, after spending time during his January visit with just-enrolled QB Cody Green.

2008



Kendal Thompkins

P.J. Smith

One who got away: Kendal Thompkins, Miami. The Huskers nearly snagged the receiver late. Pledged to Miami for months, Thompkins felt unappreciated, apparently, and visited Nebraska on the weekend before signing day. It didn't matter in the end for this prep teammate of current NU linebacker Lavonte David. Maybe he should have looked harder at NU; in three years at Miami, Thompkins has caught three passes for 10 yards.

Final score: P.J. Smith. New coach Bo Pelini tapped his Louisiana connections to snag Smith, a safety with offers from schools such as Arkansas and Southern Miss. Smith, who started in the NU secondary early last year as a sophomore, and fellow Louisiana prospect Khiry Cooper pledged after visiting Lincoln on the weekend before signing day.

End game: A busy final month ended with 12 players accepting Nebraska offers after Jan. 1 as Pelini's new staff furiously covered ground. Notably, the Huskers landed Smith, cornerback Alfonzo Dennard and safety Courtney Osborne — a sizable part of the current secondary — in the final week.

2007



Curenski Gilleylen

One who got away: Travis Lewis, Oklahoma. This one hurts more every year. Lewis was committed for more than two months to Nebraska from San Antonio's Lee High School. But the touted linebacker bolted to Oklahoma at the last minute. In his first season, he recorded an OU-freshman record 144 tackles. Then in the Big 12 championship game last month, Lewis recorded an interception in the end zone and recovered two fumbles in the Sooners' 23-20 win over NU.

Final score: Curenski Gilleylen. It was a big deal when Nebraska earned a commitment from the receiver out of Leander, Texas, near Austin. He had offers from Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma State and Tennessee. But Gilleylen did not touch the football in 2010 after recording 17 catches as a sophomore.

End game: The loss of Lewis hurt, and so did the defection of cornerback David Ross. He pulled a signing day surprise by faxing his signed letter of intent to Oregon State over NU. Receiver Niles Paul and juco defensive lineman Kevin Dixon also pledged in January to a class that featured future stars like Prince Amukamara, Eric Hagg, Roy Helu and Jared Crick.

Travis Lewis

2006



Ashlee Palmer

Major Culbert

One who got away: Ashlee Palmer, Mississippi. He signed early with Nebraska out of Compton (Calif.) College as part of a class heavy on juco talent like Maurice Purify, Carl Nicks and Andre Jones. But later in the same recruiting season, Palmer signed with Washington. He failed to qualify academically for both schools and landed as a linebacker at Ole Miss a year later before signing with the Detroit Lions as an undrafted free agent in 2009.

Final score: Major Culbert. The last commitment of the class, Culbert spurned UCLA and Oregon to jump on board in late January. His high school coach declared Culbert a better running back than five-star Marlon Lucky, who had signed a year earlier out of Los Angeles. But Culbert never reached his potential, shifting between defense and offense before he left the program in the spring of 2009.

End game: NU lost defensive tackle Charles Deas, who picked LSU over the Huskers right before signing day. But most of the drama with this recruiting season came in December, when quarterback Josh Freeman defected to Kansas State and big-time juco defensive lineman Rulon Davis switched to Cal. Freeman, of course, now starts at quarterback for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

2005



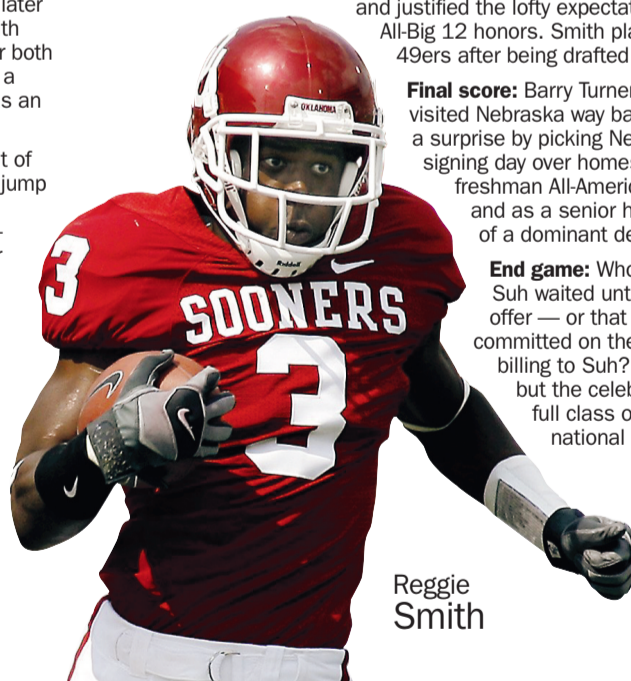
Barry Turner

One who got away: Reggie Smith, Oklahoma. The talented safety out of Edmond, Okla., looked like the cherry on top of a Nebraska recruiting class rated by some pundits as the nation's best. Alas, even ace recruiter John Blake couldn't snag Smith from Oklahoma. He picked the Sooners on signing day

and justified the lofty expectations, twice earning first-team All-Big 12 honors. Smith plays for the San Francisco 49ers after being drafted in the third round in 2008.

Final score: Barry Turner. A top defensive end who visited Nebraska way back in October, Turner delivered a surprise by picking Nebraska in the week before signing day over homestate Tennessee. He earned freshman All-America honors without redshirting, and as a senior he registered 5½ sacks as part of a dominant defensive line in 2009.

End game: Who remembers that Ndamukong Suh waited until Jan. 20 to accept Nebraska's offer — or that receiver Chris Brooks committed on the same day and received equal billing to Suh? By signing day, it was all over but the celebrating as Bill Callahan's first full class of recruits at Nebraska earned national acclaim.



Reggie Smith

FEBRUARY FINDS AND FUMBLES

BY MITCH SHERMAN | WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

LINCOLN — Welcome to the doorstep of unpredictability.

Nebraska will announce a signing class of about 20 football recruits on Wednesday. The experts will probably rank it among the nation's top 20 collections of talent, though not the top 10.

Fans and media will clamor over the skills of Bubba Starling and Jamal Turner and Aaron Green, the power of five new offensive linemen and the potential impact of junior college-trained defenders Daimion Stafford and Joseph Carter.

Predictable, right?

OK, but what comes next is difficult to forecast.

A year ago, when Nebraska signed a heralded juco linebacker, who thought Lavonte David might step right

in and set the school record for tackles in a season?

Or that Kyler Reed and Alfonzo Dennard, two relatively under-hyped recruits from coach Bo Pelini's first class in 2008, would, after three years, outshine the four- and five-star signees?

The last push before signing day is always a spectacle, as the at-large recruits whittle their options and settle on a school.

As usual, the Huskers remain in the running for a handful of prospects. Carter, a 6-foot-5, 250-pound defensive end from Chaffey (Calif.) Community College, was the latest on Friday to say he'd accepted an NU scholarship offer.

He chose Nebraska over Arizona after committing to the Wildcats last March. Carter plays a position at which

the Huskers could use a quick-impact newcomer. He might just rank as the premier late recruiting catch of this class. Or maybe not.

So go ahead, hold your breath and ride the highs and lows of recruiting when they're most pronounced.

Just remember that six years ago this week, NU signed Ndamukong Suh, who developed into arguably the best defender in school history, and another recruit with nearly identical ratings from the experts. His name? Leon Jackson, who rushed for 52 yards and left Lincoln after one year.

That's unpredictability.

Here's a look at the past six years of dramatic finishes to Nebraska recruiting.