

TSL Extra

Issue 4, February 16, 2001

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TSL EXTRA

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ON THE COVER

"Pieces of a Championship" cover collage was created by TSL message board poster RUHokie. It depicts 19 of the 21 recruits in Tech's 2001 recruiting class. Recruits not shown are Reggie Butler and Chris Pannell.

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers:

Welcome to the first annual TSLX Recruiting Issue. But I should tell you, “Recruiting Issue” might not mean what you would guess.

In the case of the TSLX, it doesn’t mean that you’ll be inundated with yet more player listings, profiles and minutiae. Lord knows, we gave you enough of that out on the main TechSideline.com web site, for free.

What we’re going to do in this issue of the TSLX is talk about some of the peripheral issues that surround recruiting. Sure, this month’s edition of “Inside the Numbers” ranks the Tech recruits from #1 to #21, but other than that, there’s not a lot of player-centric articles in this issue.

The other articles in this month’s issue, however, will delve into recruiting in a different way. We’ve got an article about Assistant Coach Jim Cavanaugh, one of Tech’s best recruiters; a short, fun piece from Coach Criswell called “Ten things every fan should know about recruiting”; a recruiting primer of do’s and don’t’s according to Assistant Head Coach Bryan Stinespring; and an edition of “Inside TSL” that breaks down the incredible impact that recruiting coverage had on TSL’s traffic in January and early February.

There’s even more than that, but you get the idea. If it’s possible to get your fill of recruiting, then this issue of the TSL Extra ought to round out your plate nicely. You’ve got all the player-related info you can possibly absorb out on the main web site, and in here, a look behind the scenes.

We had planned to include a player profile or two, including the Holy Grail of recruiting profiles (KJ), but it didn’t come together for this month. But rest assured, we continue to work towards that goal, and you’ll have more profiles to enjoy in the coming months.

And how about that cover, eh? Many thanks to message board poster “RUHokie” for his “Pieces of a Championship” collage, which depicts 19 of Tech’s 21 signees. It is truly unique and a great keepsake, and just for fun, see if you can figure out which two recruits are not shown, without looking at a list of signees.

So enjoy. And a reminder — your subscription to TSLX brings with it two benefits that you may not be aware of or may not be taking advantage of:

1.) Access to back issues. Even if you just jumped on board, you can read the back issues, all the way back to issue #1. I have made the back issues easier to access out on the main TSL Extra page (look for the “Back Issues” link near the bottom).

2.) A 10% discount at TechLocker.com. To get your 10% discount, just log on to the store and shop. Pick out whatever you want, and when the time comes to check out, the store software will ask you if you’ve got a “Quick Shop” account. Just give it the same email address and password that you use to access the TSL Extra, and voila, you’ll get 10% off of your purchase.

As always, folks, thanks for supporting the site ... and enjoy issue #4.



P.S. – As we do our best to earn an honest living, we greatly appreciate your unwillingness to share your TSL Extra password with others, as well as your discretion in not posting any of TSLX’s articles on any websites.

Recruiting Profile

Coach Jim Cavanaugh

by Art Stevens

On a cool December morning not long before Virginia Tech's Hokies played in the Gator Bowl, a visitor strode into the Merryman Center. He reached the door about the same time as Tech assistant football coach Jim Cavanaugh.

"Morning Coach Cavanaugh," came the greeting.

"Good morning, sir," came the reply from a chipper-looking Cavanaugh.

No sooner was Cavanaugh out of sight and into his office than it dawned on the guest.

Cavanaugh was on the other side of the state just last night for an in-home recruiting visit. On this night, Cavanaugh would be headed back in that direction for yet another visit.

Why was he back on campus? Wouldn't it have been easier just to stay the night?

Easier, perhaps.

But "easy" is never the way for Jim Cavanaugh when it comes to recruiting. "Thorough" is a better description and it still doesn't come close enough. If he needs to be on the road one night, he'll be there. If he needs to be in his office the next day, he'll be there. If he has to go back on the road right away, off he goes.

"There's definitely a lot of traveling. I know every bump on Interstate 64 and 81 now," Cavanaugh said. "You do get tired sometimes.

"Still, I enjoy it. I enjoy meeting the people, the players, the parents, the coaches, the evaluation process. When the day comes where I don't enjoy it, then it is time to move on. I get up in the morning now, I'm ready to go."

Cavanaugh, 52, just finished his 29th season as a recruiter on the collegiate level. He just finished his fifth season at Tech and his reputation as an excellent recruiter hasn't suffered during his days with the Hokies.

"Coach Cav" knows his business and knows it well.

"He's proven that over time," said Bryan Stinespring, the Hokies assistant head coach and recruiting coordinator. "His reputation is earned. He's more than capable of being able to lure the most attractive student-athletes into your program.

"There's no substitute for experience and Coach Cav brings a wealth of experience into the program. But there's more to Jim Cavanaugh than just the fact that he's been doing it a long time. He's highly organized. He's a straight shooter and people realize that. I think he really understands the part about building people's trust and establishing relationships. He knows it goes beyond the young man to his family, his coaching staff. He knows everyone has to feel good about what he's

Recruiting Profile

Jim Cavanaugh

trying to do.”

Cavanaugh’s previous jobs were in the region (N.C. State, Virginia Military, Marshall, Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina) so he knows the area. For Tech, he covers Richmond, Hampton, Newport News, Williamsburg and Fork Union Military Academy in the state. He also covers part of Maryland and New Jersey.

His successes in recent years include Michael Vick, Nathaniel Adibi, Kevin Lewis and Ernest Wilford among others. This year, he was responsible for the recruitment of standout quarterback (and basketball player) Bryan Randall of Bruton High in Williamsburg.

It doesn’t always come up roses. No recruiter gets them all and Cavanaugh is no exception. Among the notables who got away this year were defensive back Lionel Bolen of Mount Holly, N.J. (Notre Dame) and quarterback Michael Robinson of Richmond (Penn State). Bolen was particularly disappointing because he at one point said he was coming to Tech. The Hokies were very close to snaring Robinson, too. In fact, numerous sources say his mother was the one who preferred Penn State.

“Naturally, there are some big disappointments you have to deal with,” Cavanaugh said. “And no two individuals are the same.

“I always evaluate what I could have done better on somebody that I may have lost. And I firmly believe this: Once it has been declared, you wish him luck and you go from there. I don’t worry about the ones I don’t get. It is more important to worry about the ones you do get. They’re the ones who are going to lead you to the promised land.

“Once they make up their mind, I don’t try to talk them out of it. Michael Robinson announced his decision on a Friday at his school. The next day, I called him on his cell phone and wished him luck. Sure, you’re disappointed. Once he declares, I go on to the next one. The process moves on.”

The process never really stops. Although signing day was Feb. 7, there is no real end to recruiting. Loose ends have to be tied up (and other players can still be signed). The next recruiting season has started.

“Recruiting takes up a great deal of your time,” Cavanaugh said. “Obviously, there are particular periods of the recruiting calendar where it takes up all your time. When the season ends, until you start your bowl practices, all your time is with recruiting. Seven days a week. During the season and spring practice, you’re working on recruiting at night.

“It is a year-round proposition. We’ve already compiled our juniors list for next season. As you’re seeing games on Friday nights, you’re constantly evaluating not only the kids you’re recruiting but also the younger ones.”

Recruiting Profile

Jim Cavanaugh

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Cavanaugh will take all the players he's seen, heard about or read about and eventually come up with a list of 30-35 prospects. By June 1, he'll trim his list to 8-10 players and work from there.

A prospect must be approved by the position coach, the coordinator on his side of the ball and head coach Frank Beamer, as well as the recruiter, before he is seriously pursued.

To come up with his list, Cavanaugh relies on a variety of things.

Tape is good.

Talk is helpful.

But nothing beats plain old legwork. He likes to see the kids.

"I like to watch them play live to get a bead on guys," Cavanaugh said, "see how they handle the coaches and how the coaches handle them. I've actually seen a kid who was such a talented player but was such a pain in the neck on the sideline that I didn't recruit him for that.

"You get a lot of input, a lot of recommendations and then you go from there. Ultimately, that decision lies with you. We're paid to make good decisions. It is not a perfect business, no one bats 1.000. What you try to do is eliminate the margin of error so you can get close to that.

"I'm a better recruiter now than I was 20 years ago just because of experience. I've been in enough successful programs that I have a pretty good idea of what it takes."

Talent, as Cavanaugh noted, is not the only part of the equation.

"Speed and athleticism at their particular position are important," he said. "The next grouping is toughness and football sense. That's all I really need to know as far as on-field situations.

"Off the field, No. 1 is what type of person they are and, No. 2, what are their grades."

Just as no two players are the same, no two recruiters are the same. All kinds of people have been successful recruiters. Cavanaugh is proud that many group him in that class.

"I like to think I'm brutally honest," he said. "I like to think I can give a kid a summation of where his talents lie pretty quickly. I think the high school coaches know based on my past performance that what I tell the kids fits.

"There's so much coverage now and so much information out there. It is hard for these kids. Who can they trust? I like to think a kid can ask his high school coach and that coach will say, 'Coach Cavanaugh will shoot you straight.' I don't recruit everybody. Some people are surprised at who I do and who I don't recruit. I think I have a good feel of who will fit with what we want at Virginia Tech."

A Short List of Do's and Don'ts

by Neal Williams

Monday night, less than a week after national signing date.

Bryan Stinespring, Virginia Tech's assistant head football coach, is at home.

Surely, with a well-regarded recruiting class in the bag, Stinespring is relaxing with his wife and three children. This has to be a recruiting down time, right?

Not hardly.

"I was busy compiling my list of juniors and dropping a line to each one of them that I feel, in my area, is going to be recruited," Stinespring said. "I was hand-writing them a letter. I keep them updated as if they're already a part of my program.

"The purpose of this letter was to go over this past recruiting class and what it means and that we're already setting our sights on the top student-athletes in our state next year."

Stinespring was breaking no rules by writing high school juniors. If anyone should know, it is Stinespring.

He's a man of many hats at Tech. In addition to his new position as assistant head coach, he coaches the Hokies' offensive linemen.

He's also the team's recruiting coordinator, which means a lot of things.

"One is trying to help our program and our staff improve our relations with the high school coaches, particularly here in the state of Virginia," Stinespring said. "One of the things we've incorporated in the last two years is kind of a traveling clinic. We have our own here on campus and we'll also travel to 2-3 areas and put on a one-night, all-inclusive clinic."

Another of his duties – not that he's alone here – is to make sure he understands every aspect of the NCAA rulebook with regard to recruiting.

Each year, a coach has to take and pass an exam on those rules, which change every year.

The rulebook keeps getting thicker. Stinespring said it would probably be much easier "to do a synopsis on War and Peace" than to break down the rulebook in simple terms.

Nonetheless, he gave it a shot. Here are a few areas and guidelines coaches have to deal with when it comes to recruiting. By no means is this all-inclusive.

*** Say hey!** Coaches have limits on when and how much they can talk to recruits. There are dead periods, when nothing can happen. There are evaluation periods, when they can observe and evaluate but not talk and there are regular recruiting periods where contact is permissible.

Do's and Don't's

(continued from page 7)

Before a student becomes a junior, there are limits to what he can get in the mail. They can get a form letter or a questionnaire.

Once a student begins his junior year, he can receive unlimited mail. And that includes email. Recruiting has gone into the technological age.

"The Internet has changed things quite a bit," Stinespring said. "Now our forms include email addresses as well as the basics. It is just another way to contact them."

Beginning in May, coaches may contact recruits once a month by phone. Starting Sept. 1 of the athletes' senior year, that increases to once a week.

May is also the next evaluation time. A coach can go to the school and meet with the football coach. He can watch film, look at a transcript. He can watch a track meet or other athletic event.

"We are able to evaluate an individual but not able to talk face-to-face," Stinespring said. "That is a contact."

During the contact period, which starts in December and goes through early February, the coach can visit a prospect away from school once a week.

A head coach, however, is allowed one visit to the home and school provided it occurs on the same day.

* **You wear what size?** This is a no-no. You can send a prospect media guides (also called recruiting guides at many schools) and information about the school in general. They can get information about the field of study in which they have an interest. But don't even think about sending a hat, t-shirt or highlight film. No how, no way.

* **"We love Speedy Strongman because ..."** "One of the many misunderstood rules about recruiting involves what a college coach is allowed to say to the media about a prospect.

Most won't say anything to be safe.

The rules allow for comments about a prospect's general traits but not about what the prospect can do for a specific school.

For instance, "Speedy is speedy and he's also strong," is allowable. "Speedy because of his ability would step in here and play a lot right away," is not. But that leads to very gray areas such as, "Speedy would do well in a program that runs between the tackles a lot and just lost its top two backs." Hmmm. What program might that be? Yours, coach?

To avoid any questions, very few coaches will comment publicly on a prospect until his signed paperwork is in the school's football office. "Don't talk about what's not officially yours" is a rule of

Do's and Don't's

thumb.

* **Come see us.** A prospect can make five official recruiting trips. A school is also limited in how many prospects it can have visit. Stinespring admits he's not sure on the total since the Hokies never come close to the maximum. He thinks it is 60.

On an official visit, the school can cover the cost of travel and the expense of food and lodging for 48 hours.

Prospects can also visit on their own, as many times as they'd like. This happens frequently when a school isn't very far from the prospect's home. The prospect must pay for the entire trip, although the school is allowed to provide complimentary game tickets for the prospect and three guests, Stinespring said.

Once on campus, even on an unofficial visit, a prospect can be treated like one making an official visit.

"I can show you a highlight film, I can sit down and visit with you, we can draw plays on the board, you can sit down and visit with Coach Beamer," Stinespring said.

There's plenty more, but a lot of the rules are common sense. Don't give stuff away, don't let your boosters get involved with recruiting, etc.

The rules, Stinespring said, are there to try and keep the field level for everyone.

Tech doesn't recruit the entire nation. It hits Virginia very heavily and ventures into surrounding states and the mid-Atlantic region. It also works talent-rich Florida very hard. It does get prospects from other areas, but Stinespring said there's usually some sort of tie-in (family background at Tech, assistant coach knows high school coach from way back, that sort of thing).

Ideally, the Hokies will work with an original list that includes about four times as many prospects as there are available scholarships.

"Being able to win the battle of the state is critical for us," Stinespring said. "Any success we've had in the past or are going to have in the future is paved through the state of Virginia."

Even with all the rules to memorize and the work to do, Stinespring enjoys his recruiting responsibilities.

"I get excited every year about recruiting," he said. "I enjoy it immensely. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet and get to know different young men and their families."

Ten Things Every Fan Should Know About Recruiting

by Gary Criswell, VirginiaPreps.com

10. College coaches undergo certification by the NCAA in the knowledge of recruiting rules. This is an actual test on the NCAA recruiting rulebook. Al Groh and most of his staff had to do it before they hit the recruiting trail, so did John Bunting at UNC and Pete Carroll at USC. I have taken this test several times. It is like a lot of tests; it is an exercise in reading comprehension, since the questions are often phrased in a deceitful manner. The good news is that it is an open book test. The bad news is that you could never finish the test if you looked up every answer. I also think that most coaches resent having to take this test each year.

9. Every college coach has several great stories about his recruiting travels. For me they were more about the families of the recruits rather than about the prospect himself. In fact I actually thought that most recruits were strangely alike when they were on “your turf”. But at a recruit’s home, I could get a grip on what the young man was really like. I also remember all the great cooking that I got and all the new dishes that I got to sample (and probably haven’t sampled since). When the stories really start rolling, you realize that the best storytellers seem to be the most accomplished recruiters.

8. If there is one thing that rival coaches can agree on, it is that NCAA recruiting rules overly restrict contact with recruits. It is the overwhelming opinion of coaches that this accounts for the rise of off-the-field problems of today’s athletes. This condition dictates that the college recruiter really have a trusting (and hopefully long term) relationship with the athlete’s high school coach, since much of his data will come from that coach. It is also helpful to recruit the same territory year after year, so you can watch the recruit grow up, albeit from the distance that the NCAA dictates.

7. Academic pressures have forced schools to “widen their nets” to make sure that they get enough athletes that qualify. This causes situations that force staffs to put themselves in a position where they may have to lie to a recruit. For instance, when a team has two scholarships available at a position, they may have to recruit eight players if all eight are borderline students. Keep in mind that all eight are being told that they are “the man”. These colleges run the risk of ending up with no signees or they could sign two and end up lying to six.

6. Contrary to popular belief, recruits lie more than coaches. This is especially true if you consider withholding the truth to be a lie. The hotter the recruit, the more critical it is to establish an uninterrupted line of communication.

5. It is not your imagination; certain programs do well in certain areas and schools. Surprisingly, this is often due more to the recruiter than the loyalties of a given high school coach to the particular institution that the coach represents. I have seen college assistants change employers and go right back into a high school and beat out his former team for a star player. Like all sales jobs, recruiting is a relationship business.

4. Kids think they are “bullet proof and invisible”. It rarely occurs to them who they might find ahead of them on the depth chart. If your school is in the running for a top running back, don’t think that he will be deterred by the skills of another running back that may also be signed. First and foremost

Ten Things Every Fan Should Know

recruits pick the school that they like. It is only when they listen to adult advisors that they look into future playing time.

3. Girls matter. Consider the reasons for the recruiting success at Florida State. Bobby Bowden? Sure thing. Great football state? No question. Nice weather? A definite plus. Ten thousand coeds at neighboring Florida A&M? Bingo! Coach Bowden can tell you the exact mileage from any point on FSU's campus to any sorority house at Florida A&M. On an official visit, a verbal commitment is only a mini-skirt away.

2. Money and shady deals are less a part of the recruiting process than the average fan is led to believe. Most recruiting violations are errors of omission, not commission.

1. The pressure to recruit good athletes is tremendous. No one wants to ride a donkey in the Kentucky Derby.

Enjoy the game!

P.S. After knowing new UVa Coach Al Groh and some of his new staff for about a month, I thought I would share with you my lasting impression of Al Groh. I don't know how fast he will turn around the program in Charlottesville, but I think he will. I do know one thing; he will be a fierce recruiting adversary and because of his intensity and attitude towards other coaches and their programs, he will be maddening to lose a recruit to. Stay tuned; it will be a stormy winter of 2001-2002.

Gary Criswell has had a varied and interesting career, including stints as a high school JV football coach and head wrestling coach at Henrico High School, a baseball umpire, and an assistant football coach at Virginia Union University. Gary now works as a Sales Manager for Network Business Furniture, serves as an analyst for WRNL's High School and College sports broadcasting, and continues to work as an advisor to college coaches on recruiting. Gary runs Rivals' VirginiaPreps.com web site.

Pole-Sitting: a New TSL Phenomenon

by Matthew McKinley

High Tech was getting nervous.

On the surface, it seemed like a strange emotion to have. Recruiting was going extremely well this year. The Hokies had received verbal commitments from nine outstanding athletes for the recruiting class of 2001. From DeAngelo Hall in January to D.J. Walton in October, the class was getting better athletes earlier than ever before, and it was shaping up to be a monster haul come Signing Day. But still...

High Tech was getting frustrated.

Because it had been two months since the last verbal commitment. Posters on the Recruiting Board were getting a sense that recruiting might be slowing down. Questions were asked about recruits' intentions, bets were being placed on who might be the next to commit, and people were wondering if the current VT targets were wavering.

Finally, High Tech had had enough.

It was Friday, 8 December, when High Tech announced his intention to park himself in front of his computer, 24/7, until the next verbal was announced. It was a main topic on the board that weekend, his lonely crusade, filling the board with encouragement, laughs, and jokes about beer deliveries and catheters. Was it an over-reaction? Maybe so, but as we're always told, "hindsight is 20/20", and hindsight does tell us one thing about his sit-in:

It worked.

Justin Hamilton, the stellar running back from Clintwood, VA, committed to the Hokies on that Monday. Immediately, the cries of praise rang out on the board for High Tech's selfless act. Posters said (tongue in cheek, of course) that that act was what delivered Hamilton to the Hokie Nation, and that he was a hero for jump-starting the recruiting season back into full gear. But while the congratulations were flowing, one poster decided to take a big step further.

"I'm going to sit on top of a flagpole until the next recruit comes in," or words to that effect, showed up on the message board that Monday afternoon. This poster started a phenomenon that defined this recruiting season: pole-sitting. Who it was, nobody knows (or at least nobody who emailed me for the article knows). His or her name is probably lost in the trash-bin of Will's server, as the archives don't go back that far, so we'll probably never know who that valiant soul was. (Well, you could probably choose one of the three "Hey, that was me!" posts that are sure to follow this article, but that's up to you.) But whoever he or she was, they were the first pole-sitter in the history of TSL. And they probably would have been the last had Curtis Bradley, the mammoth OL from Summerville, SC, not verbally committed to Virginia Tech two days later.

With Bradley's commitment making it seem like this pole-sitting thing actually worked, somebody was sure to follow the first pole-sitter up the pole. And so Huntsville Hokie took his turn at the

Pole-Sitting

watch, climbing a solitary pole in the foothills of the Appalachians of Northern Alabama. The weather was cold, and wet, and he couldn't even see the Commonwealth of Virginia from where he sat (hey, it ain't Lookout Mountain, you can't see seven states from there), but he was kept warm by generous offers of booze. And his hard work paid off two more days later, on 15 December, when Chris Pannell—a prime DL prospect for the Hokies—committed.

And so we come to Atlee Hokie's tenure on the pole. He must have thought it would be easy, as both pole-sitters and High Tech received verbals within 2 or 3 days of taking up their watches. But Atlee had a long, cold stay at the top of the pole, eventually building a room up there, and setting the pole-sitter's standard rations of Wild Turkey Honey Liqueur and Cinnebons. His 14 day ordeal turned out to be incredibly fruitful for the Hokies, though, as Atlee was able to garner a commitment from Bryan Randall, the #1 player in Virginia and the Hokies top quarterback prospect, on 29 December, just in time for him to climb down the pole and head off to Jacksonville.

As Atlee Hokie was coming down for a well deserved rest, jackofalltrades was on his way up the pole, probably grumbling that he'd have to spend New Year's and the Gator Bowl on the pole. But his actions proved mighty beneficial to the pole-sitters that followed him, as he upgraded the television set at the top of the pole to a 48" flat-screen TV. ("Hey, spare no expense!" he says.) He says he also left a half-full crockpot of meatballs up there, but there was no comment from the next pole-sitter, so they must not have been any good. jackofalltrades saw us through to the new millennium (yes, I'm one of those who say that 2000 wasn't the new millennium; c'mon, was there a year zero?), pulled us through the Gator Bowl with a win, and the next day brought in Cedric Humes, another outstanding running back from Princess Anne HS in Virginia Beach.

HokieLifer, having been on deck more than once and passed over, finally was sent up the pole for what turned out to be the most grueling sit-in of the recruiting season. He admits that his tactic of "disappearing" from the Recruiting Board when a new recruit came in finally backfired in that he had to spend 22 days on the pole when he was called up. He wasn't alone, however, because at about that time, poles for Kevin Jones and Michael Robinson sprouted up, being manned by Technik and mfhokie respectively. A friendly rivalry was started with Technik over Kevin Jones, the #1 RB in the nation out of Pennsylvania, but the rivalry hit a snag when Nic Schmitt, the junior kicker from Salem, committed to the Hokies, but for the class of 2002. With Atlee Hokie consulting, HokieLifer decided to stay on the pole, and stayed up there another two weeks until word of Kevin Jones' press conference filtered onto the board. By 23 January, he was ready to step down, but it was one more day until the press conference.

However, the Hokies received *two* commitments on the afternoon and evening of 23 January. Reggie Butler, a huge OL from Hooville of all places, committed that afternoon. But HokieLifer wasn't coming down. "I've been up here over three weeks, and I'm staying at least until Kevin Jones decides." HJ Hokie decided to join him, however, just to get some new blood up there. He didn't have to stay long, as Brandon Frye, the TE/DE from Myrtle Beach, committed that night. So HJ Hokie stepped down, and HokieLifer remained, and brought in the biggest haul of our recruiting class (and probably in the history of VT football), Kevin Jones.

Pole-Sitting

(continued from page 13)

With the commitment of Kevin Jones, and with the announcement of Fred Lee, the playmaker WR out of Pennsylvania, imminent, h0kie76 took his turn on the pole. He had been waiting on deck for his turn since just after the Gator Bowl, and during HokieLifer's long stint he must have been practicing, for Fred Lee committed to the Hokies the next day. It was a very efficient use of the pole, and he was down almost as fast as he went up.

With Fred Lee's commitment, bulab climbed away, and within 5 days, was able to bring in Andrew Fleck. Fleck, a TE from far-off Oklahoma, committed to the Hokies on 30 January, and it was time for another pole-sitter.

But the next volunteer, HokieBrazil, was a model of efficient pole-sitting as well, bringing in Jason Murphy, the monster DT prospect from Maryland, on the very next day. I think that HokieBrazil and h0kie76 must have compared notes, because they each brought in a major VT target within 24 hours. A fine example these two pole-sitters made, and more of that was needed as we moved into February, and the last week of recruiting.

HokiePride sat down in the hot seat, and while he was on the pole, Michael Robinson committed to Penn State. mfhokie, who had started his Michael Robinson pole-sit weeks earlier, climbed down from the MR pole in shame for his failure, but there was more heartache to come. In the space of two days, 3 and 4 February, Lionel Bolen committed and de-committed from the Hokies, and committed instead to Notre Dame. The important DB prospect must have been busy on the phones those days. HokiePride had stepped down from the pole, but his return was demanded. He is still on the pole at the current time (or at the very least, he *should* be), as we still have a recruit pending in California LB Jordan Trott. However, we haven't heard a word from HokiePride since he went up, and we can only hope that he's doing his job, and that his laptop batteries have died, making it impossible for him to post.

Pole-sitting was an interesting way to view the 2001 recruiting season. As HJ Hokie relates, "[it] was quite amusing to me....and it helped make it seem like we were still part of the VT team, as Coach Beamer says sometimes." Another view was offered by jackofalltrades, who stated that he thought the process added a lot of fun to the waiting. He says he plans to follow Cedric Humes, "his" recruit, closely through his VT career, but doesn't plan on climbing the pole again until he graduates. I plan to follow "my" recruit, Chris Pannell, as well.

But probably the most telling comment about a pole-sitting experience, even though he didn't actually pole-sit, was from High Tech. "[It] seemed like the thing to do at the time."

That it did, High Tech. That it did.

Now, who is going up the pole for our next 2002 recruit?

Analysis

Inside the Numbers: Ranking the Recruits

by Will Stewart, *TechSideline.com*

Okay, so we've all seen what Rivals.com, SuperPrep, and PrepStar think of Virginia Tech's recruits. They've all got their own ranking systems, of one kind or another. But they're maddeningly inconsistent from recruiting service to recruiting service.

Rivals.com, for example, rates Andrew Fleck as the #62 tight end in the country, but PrepStar and SuperPrep don't seem to know that he exists. SuperPrep and Rivals.com rate Kevin Jones as the #1 player in the country overall, but PrepStar doesn't even call him the #1 running back (they rate him as the #2 RB, behind Tennessee Jabari Davis).

So the question arises, what do you get when you throw the Rivals, SuperPrep, and PrepStar rankings into a pot and mix them up? Can you come up with a rating system that combines all three of those systems into a composite ranking?

Of course you can — that's why I wrote this article. I'm about to take all 21 of Tech's signees and throw them and their rankings into a formula that will chew them up and spit them out into a TSL composite recruiting ranking that will list them from top to bottom, from #1 to #21.

First, a disclaimer: if you're into this stuff, you may think that the formula and methodology that I use stinks. So let me warn you not to take this too seriously. I'm always under time constraints here at TSL, so when I came up with my ranking system, I probably put a grand total of 30 minutes of thought into it, tops. The remaining hours and hours were spent coming up with a spreadsheet full of formulas and entering everyone's rankings into it, and then wrapping this wordy article around it.

If you're not a detail oriented person, and you like to bite the Tootsie Pop and immediately get to the chewy center, then you can skip to the end of this article and see the final TSL recruiting rankings, which list all 21 players from the highest-rated to the lowest-rated.

If, on the other hand, you like to eat a Tootsie Pop one lick at a time and take your sweet time getting to that chewy Tootsie Roll center, or if you're just the type of person who likes to see numbers discussed in mind-numbing detail, then pull up a chair.

I will first describe all three ranking systems (Rivals, SuperPrep, and PrepStar), and then I'll describe how they're integrated into a TSL composite ranking. Then I'll present the final rankings for your perusal. And if you're really insane, I'll even give you a link so you can download the spreadsheet I used, which is totally incomprehensible and may even be chock full of errors.

Remember, this is supposed to be fun. Let's go.

SuperPrep Rankings

SuperPrep can give up to three honors to a player, depending upon how highly he is ranked. They are as follows:

Elite 50: the top 50 players in the country, ranked from #1 to #50, without regards to position.

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All-American: the top 285 players in the country, split up and ranked by position. Among the 285 AA's, SP ranks 25 quarterbacks from #1 to #25, 40 running backs, 9 tight ends, 35 wide receivers, 3 fullbacks, 37 offensive linemen, 37 defensive linemen, 40 defensive backs, 34 linebackers, 20 skill athletes, and 5 jumbo athletes.

All-State: the top 1037 players in the country, ranked in their state, without regards to position. For smaller states, SP will combine them into a region. Some examples: Florida has a Top 91 ranked from #1 to #91, Texas has a Top 118, Virginia has a Top 28, and there is a Mid-Atlantic Top 34 that is taken from Delaware, DC, Maryland, and West Virginia.

Note that a player in SuperPrep's system who is in the Elite 50 is also, by default, All-American and All-State. Likewise, every All-American is an All-State player.

PrepStar Rankings

I don't like PrepStar's ranking system. It's sort of like SuperPrep's, but not really, and it is impossible to fit it properly into a mathematical formula. Like SuperPrep, PrepStar can honor players in up to three ways:

Dream Team: the top 120 players in the country, split up and ranked by position. Among the 120 Dream-Teamers, PS ranks 14 quarterbacks from #1 to #14, 20 running backs, 3 tight ends, 18 wide receivers, 18 offensive linemen, 20 defensive linemen, 8 defensive backs, 11 linebackers, 6 athletes, and 2 kickers.

All-American: the top ??? players in the country (PS doesn't explicitly say how many All-Americans they have, and I'm not going to flip through their magazine and count them), ranked in their region, by position. PS has six regions: Western, Midlands, Southeast, Midwest, Atlantic, and Eastern. So, for example, if a player is ranked as the #6 running back in the Southeast region, that means he is an All-American.

All-Region: this ranking is a little confusing and annoying. In their regional rankings, beneath the AA level, PS lists players as All-Region, but there is no effort made to "rank" them — they're just listed. For example, in the Atlantic Region, PS ranks 7 running backs #1 to #7, which means that they're All-Americans. Then they list 6 more running backs in alphabetical order, without rankings. The second 6 guys are All-Region. The first 7 guys, with ranking numbers, are AA's *and* All-Region.

Similar to SuperPrep, a PrepStar Dream Teamer is also an All-American and All-Region player. Every All-American is All-Region.

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Rivals.com Rankings

Rivals takes a lot of heat for the perceived accuracy of their rankings, but as a rating system, they're the simplest and easiest to understand. And, most importantly for this article, they're by far the easiest to cram into a mathematical formula. Rivals.com honors players in up to three ways (are you seeing a pattern here?):

Rivals 100: the top 100 players in the country, ranked from #1 to #100, without regards to position.

Rivals Position Ranking: Rivals ranks the top 100 QB's in the country, the top 100 running backs, wide receivers, tight ends, offensive linemen, defensive tackles, defensive ends, linebackers, cornerbacks, safeties, kickers, and punters.

Rivals Stars: every player listed in Rivals' system gets ranked from 1 to 5 stars, with 5 stars being the best. The 5 star ranking is very exclusive, so exclusive that there are players on the prestigious Rivals 100 list who are "only" four-star players. Only a few dozen kids out of thousands are given 5 stars.

TSL's Composite Rankings

Now that I've explained how SuperPrep, PrepStar, and Rivals.com rank the recruits, the idea is to take the nine different ranking levels of the three services listed above and compile them into one composite ranking.

For each of the nine ranking levels, I'm going to award a player 0 to 5 points, for a total maximum composite rank of 45. Here's how the points are going to be awarded (please see the "Important Note" after I talk about the points system):

SuperPrep Elite 50: 0 points if the player is not in the Elite 50, and 1 to 5 points if he is. The #50 player gets 1 point, the #1 player gets 5 points, and those in between are awarded points on a sliding scale.

SuperPrep All-American: 0 points if the player is not an AA, and 1 to 5 points if he is. The player gets 5 points if he is the top-rated All-American at his position, and 1 point if he is the bottom-rated All-American at his position. Players in between are awarded points on a sliding scale. Examples: the #1 running back gets 5 points, and so does the #1 QB, etc., but the #40 running back (out of 40) gets 1 point, and the #25 QB (out of 25) gets 1 point.

SuperPrep All-State: 0 points if the player is not ranked in the state, and 1 to 5 points if he is. The player gets 5 points if he is the top rated player in the state, 1 point if he is the bottom rated player in the state, and those in between are awarded points on a sliding scale. Example: Kevin Jones (#1 in PA out of 35 players) gets 5 points, while Fred Lee (#9) gets 4.09 points.

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PrepStar Dream Team: 0 points if the player is not on the Dream Team, and 1 to 5 points if he is. The player gets 5 points if he is the top-rated Dream Teamer at his position, and 1 point if he is the bottom-rated Dream Teamer at his position. Players in between are awarded points on a sliding scale. Examples: the #1 running back gets 5 points, and so does the #1 QB, etc., but the #20 running back (out of 20) gets 1 point, and the #14 QB (out of 14) gets 1 point.

PrepStar All-American: 0 points if the player is not a PrepStar AA, and 1 to 5 points if he is. The player gets 5 points if he is the top rated player at his position in his region, 1 point if he is the bottom rated player at his position in the region, and those in between are awarded points on a sliding scale. Example: Curtis Bradley (#1 OL in the Atlantic region out of 10 players) gets 5 points, while Danny McGrath (#5) gets 3.40 points.

PrepStar All-Region: 0 points if a player is not All-Region, 5 points if he is. Remember, PS lists players who are All-Region alphabetically and does not rank them, so there's no way to split the ranking further. Therefore, I award a straight 5 points for being PS All-Region.

Rivals.com "Rivals 100": 0 points if the player is not in the Rivals 100, and 1 to 5 points if he is. The #1 player gets 5 points, the #100 player gets 1 point, and those in between are awarded points on a sliding scale.

Rivals.com Position Rank: 0 points if the player is not ranked at his position, and 1 to 5 points if he is. The #1 player at his position gets 5 points, the #100 player gets 1 point, and those in between are awarded points on a sliding scale.

Rivals.com Stars: 1 point for each star. One-star players get 1 point, two-star players get 2 points, etc.

Important Note!! The mathematical formula that I used is a little sloppy, and the sliding scale isn't perfect. For players ranked 1 to 50, for example, it will give 5 points to the #1 player, but it actually gives 1.02 points to the #50 player, not 1 point. I could have taken the time to iron out the formula perfectly, but it's pretty darn close, so I went with it, primarily due to schedule pressures.

And Without Further Ado...

To summarize:

- A player can get up to 5 points from 9 different ranking sources (three services, three categories for each service, 0 to 5 points in each category).
- 45 is the highest possible composite rank. For a recruit to be ranked as a 45, he would have to be the top player in the SuperPrep Elite 50, be the top-ranked player at his position on the PrepStar Dream Team, and be the #1 player in the Rivals 100.

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- The lowest possible composite rank is 1 (every player in the Rivals.com system gets at least one star). For a recruit to receive a ranking of 1, he would have to be unranked in all services and earn just one star in his Rivals.com ranking.

Now, here are Tech's 21 signees, and their composite rankings:

Composite Rankings

Player	Super Prep	PrepStar	Rivals.com	Total
Jones, Kevin	15.0	14.8	15.0	44.8
Randall, Bryan	13.7	14.1	8.3	36.1
Hall, DeAngelo	9.1	8.7	8.7	26.4
Lee, Fred	6.0	11.9	8.3	26.2
Hamilton, Justin	7.0	8.9	7.7	23.5
Humes, Cedric	6.3	9.4	5.0	20.7
Bradley, Curtis	1.8	13.7	4.9	20.4
Walton, D.J.	6.9	7.3	5.7	20.0
King, Jeff	3.4	8.9	6.8	19.1
Pannell, Chris	2.7	8.5	4.5	15.7
Hunt, Will	2.5	5.0	5.9	13.4
McGrath, Danny	1.7	8.4	2.0	12.1
Warren, Blake	2.9	5.0	4.2	12.0
Hilton, Kevin	2.1	6.6	3.2	11.9
Murphy, Jason	3.2	0.0	6.5	9.8
Anderson, James	1.4	6.9	1.0	9.3
Clifton, Chris	1.9	5.0	2.0	8.9
Fleck, Andrew	0.0	0.0	4.6	4.6
Sandidge, Tim	2.0	0.0	2.0	4.0
Butler, Reggie	0.0	0.0	2.0	2.0
Frye, Brandon	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0

Average Player Ranking: 16.3

Top player: Kevin Jones (44.8 points out of 50) is the #1 rated recruit overall by SuperPrep and Rivals.com, so he gets 15 points from both of them. Kevin is the #2-rated running back by PrepStar, and that drops him to 14.8 points (out of a possible 15) from PrepStar. Obvious prediction: you will likely *never* see a higher-rated recruit than Kevin Jones sign with Virginia Tech.

Bottom player: Brandon Frye (1 point out of 50) was not ranked by SuperPrep, PrepStar, or Rivals.com, and was a Rivals 1-star player. But I'm not worried about Brandon. If the VT coaches want him, that means he's got potential.

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Random example: Curtis Bradley (20.4 out of 50). Curtis is not a SuperPrep Elite 50 or a SuperPrep AA, but he is ranked as the #27 player out of 33 in South Carolina — 1.85 SuperPrep points. Curtis is a PrepStar Dream Teamer (#7 OL out of 18 — 3.67 points), All-American (#1 OL in his region — 5.00 points), and All-Region (5.00 points) — 13.67 PrepStar points. Curtis is not in the Rivals 100, but he is a 3-star Rivals player (3.00 points), and the #79 OL in the country (1.88 points) — 4.88 Rivals.com points. Curtis's total is $1.85 + 13.67 + 4.88 = 20.4$ points.

Rankings by Position

Just for fun, let's sort those composite rankings by position (the position is according to the flyer handed out at the Recruiting Rally on Feb. 11th in Roanoke — note that Chris Clifton is listed as a QB/ATH on that flyer, but is included as a QB here):

Player	Posn	Ranking
Hall, DeAngelo	DB	26.4
Walton, D.J.	DB	20.0
Pannell, Chris	DL	15.7
Hilton, Kevin	DL	11.9
Murphy, Jason	DL	9.8
Sandidge, Tim	DL	4.0
Frye, Brandon	DL	1.0
Warren, Blake	LB	12.0
Anderson, James	LB	9.3
Bradley, Curtis	OL	20.4
McGrath, Danny	OL	12.1
Butler, Reggie	OL	2.0
Randall, Bryan	QB	36.1
Hunt, Will	QB	13.4
Clifton, Chris	QB	8.9
Jones, Kevin	RB	44.8
Hamilton, Justin	RB	23.5
Humes, Cedric	RB	20.7
King, Jeff	TE	19.1
Fleck, Andrew	TE	4.6
Lee, Fred	WR	26.2

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And let's look at it another way:

Posn	# of Players	Avg. Rank
RB	3	29.7
WR	1	26.2
DB	2	23.2
QB	3	19.5
All	21	16.3
TE	2	11.9
OL	3	11.2
LB	2	10.7
DL	5	8.5

You can see that this class is very strong in tailbacks and defensive backs, with a nod to QB's (where Clifton is underrated), and the one wide receiver (Fred Lee) is a good one.

The tight ends, offensive linemen, and defensive linemen all have great potential in Mike Gentry's system. There is no question that Tech got what they wanted there, despite the "low" composite ranking. Jason Murphy (DL) in particular is underrated by the services, as is Reggie Butler (OL), due to academics (both players were shaky academically but qualified late).

Lastly, the two linebackers, Blake Warren and James Anderson, are both very smart kids who have great physical ability and will do well.

The conclusion is simple, folks: no matter what ranking criteria you apply, the Hokie coaches got what they wanted, and this is the greatest Virginia Tech football recruiting class ever.

The Data

This spreadsheet I used for analysis, is available for download at the following location (Microsoft Excel 97 compatible):

<http://www.techsideline.com/tslextra/issue004/RecruitingRankings.xls>

Warning: it is nearly incomprehensible, so download it and read it at your own risk. Hopefully, it contains no significant errors.

Inside TSL: Recruiting Coverage is King

by Will Stewart, *TechSideline.com*

Five years ago, in late 1995 and early 1996, a web site about Big East Football, started by Mike Bakas, was getting some pretty good traffic. That was back in the early days of the Web, and Mike had one of the best sites around for football coverage. The centerpiece of the site was the first threaded message board I ever saw, and it had Canes, Hokies, and Mountaineers all going at it in the same forum. It was my first exposure to the type of interactivity that the web is all about.

When I started Hokie Central in March of 1996, Mike found it and put a link to it on his web site, and as many of you have heard me say before, it was Mike's promotion of my site that gave me a lot of my traffic in those early days.

Hokie Central grew and grew, and Mike's Big East site continued to prosper, as well. In February of 1997, I finally added a message board to Hokie Central, and the result was that it gutted Mike's Big East message board. The Hokies who had been dominating Mike's board migrated over to HC, and Mike's site suddenly got very quiet. It didn't help Mike that Grassy had started a very good Miami Hurricanes message board and that Vernon Bailey had a strong WVU message board, as well.

Like many people, I fell out of touch with Mike Bakas's Big East Football site, and one day, when I stopped in for a quick visit, I discovered the Mike had renamed his site "Eastern Football Journal" and had turned it from a football site into a football *recruiting* site.

At the time, I figured that Mike had seen the handwriting on the wall, namely, that the sites dedicated to individual schools were the wave of the future, and that a site like his dedicated to an entire conference was not a successful venture. I figured he was trying his hand at recruiting coverage to see how that would work out.

That wasn't really it, though. I should have given Mike more credit. What Mike had discovered, even way back then, was that recruiting coverage was where it was at, not general football coverage. He was going where the interest and the page views were.

It paid off for him, too. Mike's "Eastern Football Journal" and its recruiting-focused coverage was later picked up by the Rivals.com network in a deal that I imagine was fairly lucrative for Mike. Mike, you see, was just a teenager. He abruptly quit his site some time in the year 2000 (I don't remember exactly when) so he could ... go to college.

But I digress. Back to my point about recruiting. I have discovered that when it comes to generating traffic, there's nothing like recruiting coverage to bring on the hits.

For years, I avoided recruiting coverage. Silly me.

The Beginning of TSL's Recruiting Coverage

In the early years of HokieCentral, recruiting coverage was something to briefly fill the football void between the season and Spring Football. I didn't pay recruiting much attention, except right around

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signing day each year. Every year, I would see a little uptick in traffic around early February, but that was the extent of it.

Of course, I always wrote articles about the recruits who were verbally committing to Tech and signed with Tech, but I never dedicated a page or a message board to recruiting until James Arthur came on board in August of 1999.

James's primary responsibility on HokieCentral was recruiting coverage, and from August of 1999 until late July of 2000, that's what he did. We set up a recruiting home page and some target lists, and we even put together a little "Flash" page for James to keep visitors up to date on the latest recruiting news.

The coverage was decent, and it did some good numbers, but we never really gave James the tools to make it take off. Then, right around the time he left HC, in July of 2000, we finally put in a dedicated recruiting message board. And the final piece of the puzzle came in early December, when we installed the recruiting database, programmed by Hokie Matt and his company, Wired Triangle, LLC.

I could see that the message board and the database were increasing the interest in recruiting and were generating some good hit numbers, but nothing could prepare me for what happened in the five weeks spanning January and early February of 2001.

Traffic didn't take a "little uptick." It exploded.

Before I get into that, let's remind you of the hit statistic history that I've given you in the last two issues of the TSL Extra. The highest traffic days ever in the history of HokieCentral and TSL centered around the Beamer-to-UNC saga and the Vick-to-the-NFL saga. Those two events created 6 of the 7 highest traffic days ever on this web site, with the other big-traffic day coming the Monday after Tech was snubbed by the BCS.

Here are the daily page view stats for those seven days:

Date	Page Views	Story Line
11/26/2000	280,141	Beamer-to-UNC
11/27/2000	606,637	Beamer-to-UNC
11/28/2000	215,364	Beamer-to-UNC
12/4/2000	222,889	BCS Snubs Tech
1/9/2001	238,481	Vick-to-the-NFL
1/10/2001	242,118	Vick-to-the-NFL
1/11/2001	248,598	Vick-to-the-NFL

Other than the 7 days listed there, the web site exceeded 200,000 page views a day just one other time. On 1/4/2001, we did 211,141 page views (I think it was the post Gator Bowl euphoria).

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But get a load of this: in the 16-day stretch from January 23rd, 2001 to February 7th, 2001 (signing day), the web site exceeded 200,000 page views 12 times, including 3 days over 300,000 page views!

The Stories Behind the Hits

The page views were all generated by recruiting coverage, of course. Kevin Jones, Michael Robinson, and signing day were the big days of interest.

Kevin Jones announced his commitment to Tech on January 24th. Here are the page view stats for the three days surrounding his verbal:

Date	Page Views	Story Line
1/23/2001	232,768	Kevin Jones verbals to Tech
1/24/2001	359,153	Kevin Jones verbals to Tech
1/25/2001	304,108	Kevin Jones verbals to Tech

Michael Robinson announced on Feb. 2nd that Penn State was his school of choice. Here are the page view stats for the day before and the day of Michael's announcement:

Date	Page Views	Story Line
2/1/2001	209,494	Michael Robinson verbals to PSU
2/2/2001	234,965	Michael Robinson verbals to PSU

Lastly, signing day itself was on Feb. 7th. It generated 304,774 page views:

Date	Page Views	Story Line
2/7/2001	304,774	Signing Day 2001

Beamer vs. Vick vs. Recruiting

If you're like me, you wonder what happens when you throw all those events together and rank them by page views. What news items generated the most page views?

News Item	Avg. Daily Page Views
Beamer-to-UNC	367,381
Signing Day 2001	304,774
KJ's Verbal	298,676
Vick-to-the-NFL	243,066
Robinson's Verbal	226,730
BCS Snubs Tech	222,889

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But Back to the Subject of Recruiting

Sorry to inundate you with page view stats like that. I got carried away. Lord knows that this month's "Inside the Numbers" feature is full of enough statistics to glaze over even the most numbers-oriented people out there.

But to gauge the true impact that the new recruiting message board and recruiting database had on TSL's traffic, I need to throw just a few more stats at you. They're easy to follow, so let's get them out of the way, and then I'll gab a little more.

During the 1999 football season, TSL did about 90,000 page views a day. That dropped to 70,000 page views a day during January of 2000, and then to 55,000 page views a day in February of 2000.

During the 2000 football season, TSL did about 120,000 page views a day. That rose to 178,000 page views a day during January of 2001, and as of February 15th, the site was averaging 161,000 page views a day during February of 2001.

January 2001's statistic of 178,000 page views a day blew away the next closest month — November of 2000 with 135,000 page views a day. That's an increase of 32% from November 2000 to January 2001.

But the single most significant event with regards to traffic was this: for the month of January, 2001, for the first time ever in the history of the site, the Main/Football Message Board did not lead the site in traffic. The Recruiting Message Board beat it out, by a wide margin. The Main/Football Board did 666,257 page views, but the Recruiting Board trounced it, pulling in 947,784 page views, or nearly a million.

(As a sidebar, those of you who think the Main/Football Board often degenerates into pages upon pages of off-topic, trivial chatting ought to take a look at the Recruiting Board. It is by far the most on-topic, player intensive discussion around, led by some of TSL's best posters. The Basketball Board is also very good discussion, but at this point, no one cares.)

So I wondered, "Sure, recruiting is fun and interesting, but don't you think more page views would be generated during the season, when games are actually being played?" I guess not.

I think one thing that leads to the tremendous page views generated by recruiting coverage is that the Internet is *the* place to follow recruiting. To put it simply, during football season, you can see the games on TV to find out who won, but during "recruiting season," the only place you can find out "who won" is on the Web. Right here on TSL and other sites.

ESPN, my friend, does not cover recruiting. TSL — and the horde of Rivals.com sites and other

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sites that we rely on for news — does.

At TSL, I have finally discovered what Mike Bakas knew years ago: recruiting is king on college football web sites.

See you next month.