

Nebraska Football Press Conference
Signing Day
February 2, 2005
Head Coach Bill Callahan

Opening Statement

Good afternoon. We are extremely pleased and very excited to announce this 2005 recruiting class. At this time, we have signed what I believe to be 31 of the finest football players in the country. We feel strongly that these players fit the profile that we are looking for in a student-athlete. We feel strongly that these players will fit our systems and will fit our style of play here at Nebraska. Many of the players we have signed today to the National Letter of Intent have been targeted early through the process, starting last spring, fall and through the winter months. This process has been long over the year, and we are excited to have them as a part of the Nebraska tradition.

I'd also like to take this time to acknowledge our staff for an outstanding job. Every assistant coach contributed greatly to this recruiting class. There was a total team effort in every sense, and I appreciate the hard work, the sacrifice and the effort that our coaches gave to this program. I know we had a lot of fun putting this class together, and it's always great to have a group of guys you enjoy being with. In this business, it's hard to work 16- and 18-hour days and travel around the country and be with guys who enjoy football. This is a tremendous staff, and it's great to have these types of people around our program. They've done an excellent job in identifying and evaluating and selling the University of Nebraska. There's no doubt in my mind their contributions will provide some winning in the near future. They have shown tremendous resiliency in some real tough situations and conditions here at Nebraska. I think it's really tough to be 5-6 here at Nebraska and go out and recruit a nationally top-ranked class. I think it's extremely tough, extremely demanding, and I'm proud of the fact that we didn't let any external forces attack our integrity or the purpose of what we were trying to get accomplished. My hat's off to our assistant coaches.

As a staff, our goal was to be one of the top recruiting staffs in the country. We take a lot of pride in this aspect of our program, and this group of coaches thoroughly understands the importance of recruiting. Again, I'm really proud of their efforts, and they deserve all the credit for bringing this class to Nebraska.

I'd also like to thank the many people behind the scenes who contributed to this effort. That starts with our athletic director, Steve Pederson. Steve is very active in the recruiting process. It's very important to have an athletic director who supports what you do as a football coach, but he goes above and beyond that realm as an athletic director. He gets personally involved in talking to every athlete that comes here on campus. For him to take time out of his schedule, that means a lot to me as a head football coach. He does have a powerful message. Being a former recruiting coordinator, he understands what recruiting is all about, and he definitely added to the success of this class. It was great to have Steve actively be a part of this.

I also want to extend my appreciation to everyone who has helped out. Our secretaries, Judy Weaver and her student assistants did an excellent job in that realm. Our student assistants upstairs helping collect data and do all the tough administrative work that nobody wants to do, I'm really appreciative of them. Our faculty has done an excellent job in taking time from their schedules on the weekends to visit with students and parents. The community here in Lincoln also makes it a great place for a recruit to come visit. I'm sincerely appreciative of the efforts the people around here have shown toward our recruits and to their parents.

I also want to make mention of our academic and student support services led by Dennis LeBlanc and his staff. They do an excellent job whenever a player and his parents come to campus. This is the most important part of any official visit when a student arrives on campus. His staff is superb. When a parent and an athlete come out of a meeting with Dennis, they are completely blown away by the academic plan of success they have outlined for that particular player and his course of study at the University of Nebraska. Our academic people are second to none. They do an outstanding job, and they have a genuine concern and interest for every player who comes here and visits. They really extend themselves, whether it's 8:00 in the morning or 11:00 at night, they really extend themselves. They spend a lot of time, and it's a tremendous sacrifice for them to spend time away from their families, and we are really appreciative of their efforts.

I publicly would like to thank our current players and our former players for the great job they did in selling Nebraska to the signees. I think it's imperative that your current players do a great job of selling the recruits while they are here on campus. It's my conviction that players sell players. Our players did a tremendous job despite some of the failures we had this season. I'm talking about players like Josh Bullocks and Fabian Washington, guys who have left our squad, who really worked hard in recruiting efforts this fall. After a game, hosting several recruits, taking them out, talking to them about Nebraska and what the tradition is all about – I sincerely appreciate those efforts. It's important to understand the dynamic that goes in behind that. It would have been very easy for these players not to help when things turned south a little bit

during the course of the season, when times got tough. Our current players really stood up and supported this staff and supported the recruiting efforts we need here to be successful. We have some great salesmen on our team, and they have done an excellent job extending themselves and selling the Nebraska football program. I can't say enough about their efforts. They have done just a terrific job, and it's a great indicator of character that our players have shown across the board.

The other thing I want to say is that we have an individual in our administration by the name of Paul Miles, and he has done a great job. Paul takes time away from his weekends to come visit our players, and I think that all goes into packaging a program. When you have people administratively, people within your department and players who extend themselves, it's what Nebraska is all about. It may seem mundane to some, but it is critical that we have that type of support system that allows an athlete to come to Nebraska and feel comfortable and confident in his college career.

I also want to mention our fans. They have been terrific. I can't thank our fans enough for their constant support of mailings, letters and e-mails that I receive on a daily basis. Your support is much appreciated and much needed. We appreciate all the kind words you have given us in the past few months. It's meant a great deal to all of us. I want to say this: Our fans have definitely impacted our recruiting. We only have nine full-time assistant coaches on staff, and our fans, in my belief, are the 10th full-time coach here at Nebraska. They have extended themselves in so many ways that you can't even believe the impact they have had on this recruiting class. I'm talking about the 61,000 fans at the spring game. You impacted 100 recruits at that particular game. We signed a number of those players from that particular event. During the season, we had a number of official visits here on campus. We had players in the tunnel and outside in the end zone, and they felt very much appreciated and wanted to be a part of the Nebraska tradition. Then you look at the San Antonio U.S. Army All-American game, and we had a number of fans down there supporting our committed players. I can't thank you enough for your support and what you've done and how you've helped this class. I just want to say that every recruit I have spoken to after an official visit says the fans are the most impressive. It's the No. 1 thing that a recruit gravitates to and talks about when he comes to Nebraska. It's the fans. It's the support that our fans generate and the enthusiasm they enjoy, and that's why they want to be here. I don't think anybody would deny that we have the best fans in America and the best game-day experience in college football. There's no reason why anybody wouldn't want to come here after going through an experience like that, so we're very much appreciative of all our fans and what they do for our program.

Today we've added some outstanding athletes to the University of Nebraska. We've signed 31 players in this class. We're pleased and excited, and I'd like to believe we've made all the right moves to improve our program. I know that we can continue to improve what we're doing from a recruiting standpoint, and we can continue to coach better and grow as a team. We can get better, and we will get better. This class provides that impetus. I think it's a little early and premature to speculate how the careers of these young men are going to end up, but I'm really confident that our staff will do an outstanding job in developing their athletic and academic skills. I believe that this group of players really, truly complements the core players we have on this team. I just want to say also that these players we're bringing in want to be here. They want what we want, and they want to win, just like our current players want to win. They will contribute in every way to help get this program where we need to be. There's no doubt in my mind that they will add to a positive team chemistry here at Nebraska.

Another one of our goals was to bring in the very best players around the country at their respective positions. I believe we did that. I believe that this class possesses outstanding balance and quality. We had 28 scholarships to give this year. We had 25 to offer, which is the maximum that you can give in a given year. We had the ability and the flexibility to count three scholarships back. I just want everyone to know that we formulate a number of strategies as a staff to feel very good about where we are. Twenty-eight is the number we have to work with at the beginning of training camp in the fall, so we have plenty of time before we have to solidify our final number. We did sign 31, and no one in this particular recruiting class is eligible until that point in time of training camp in the fall of 2005. These players must go through graduation, the NCAA Clearinghouse, and they must be accepted to the University formally. We have discussed several contingencies with some of the players we have recruited. We have communicated clearly and continually with our administration. We had a fine plan going into this, and we have an excellent plan laid out for their careers here at Nebraska. This has all been done within the spirit of the rules and with the best interest of the players and their families that we dealt with. I just want to make the point that it is not uncommon to oversign in college football. It's a very common trend, and I understand that it is unusual here at the University of Nebraska that we are overextended, but I just want you understand that we have an outstanding plan. I think it's important to understand that we needed balance out of our class and the positions we recruited. In a nutshell, we got a unique blend of high school and community college players. Additionally, we have balanced the board in terms of our recruiting numbers and balanced our classes in some voids where they lacked. We picked up some numbers with the help of junior college recruiting in that respect. It allowed us to balance the numbers in our third- and fourth-year classes as seen on the roster.

I think it's also important to understand that we are going to give every player in this recruiting class an opportunity to compete for a starting position and to contribute to winning football here. This class is outstanding athletically. It will give us excellent depth and provide us with great competition. It also has that element of production that is exciting here to us as coaches and fans. We're satisfied where the players are, and I hope that every athlete we have recruited has that dream of coming here and starting here at Nebraska.

We have recruited some additional numbers this year. We have recruited 12 junior college football players, and through this avenue of recruiting, it has given us another option to explore in this process. I look at junior college recruiting in two-fold. I'm very selective and very need-oriented when it comes to that. But if a player out there can upgrade us and fill a need, I feel it's worth it and it's good to have those types of players in your program only if they fit your profile. The profile we look at has three things: at No. 1, academics, No. 2, their character and No. 3, at their athletic skill. Those are the three profiles we look at closely in this process. We have many, many discussions. We make sure every player we bring here fits the profile for what we're looking for and fits that criteria.

I had our Sports Information office do a study on junior college recruiting in the last few years in the Big 12. It's interesting to note that on the roster in the Big 12, there are over 120 junior college players. As you look at the divisional breakdown, there are over 70 players in the Big 12 North from junior college ranks. As you look at the South, there are 49 players in the South. As you look at the players in Texas, they are less apt to take a junior college player, although they have. The Big 12 North is an area where people have taken more junior college transfers across the board. I don't think it's a trend, I just think it's a fact. For us, again, this won't be something we do normally every year, but it's something we had to do this year. As we go into next year, we'll examine the needs as it unfolds, and we'll look closely. It's something we have to do in order to balance our classes and provide us with the necessary depth across the board.