

Head Coach Bill Callahan
Opening Statement

"This is an exciting day for our program and for our fans. We're extremely excited about this new recruiting class, and we believe that it represents an outstanding group of players. There is no question in my mind that we have elevated our talent level and we have added value to our football team.

"We have a profile and a template that we follow very closely here. In terms of the recruiting process, I believe we met our needs relative to the plan we set out with. Our staff has spent an incredible amount of time and energy bringing these players here to Nebraska, and I just want to take a moment here to thank them for their efforts. I also want to thank everyone in our department. I'm talking about secretaries, student workers, the faculty; everybody that is in the Athletic Department did a great job helping throughout the recruiting year and the recruiting process.

"There are two people that did an exceptional job with our recruiting organization and with the day-to-day operations that we do in recruiting. That is Bryan Heard, our assistant recruiting coordinator, and also Vince Guinta. Both of them did a great job and I just want to commend them on what they did for our staff, and for the hard work and the effort that they put into this recruiting year.

"What I'd like to say about the players that we signed today is that each and every one of the players that we signed today loves football, and loves to compete. Those are the two things that we looked for when we set out on the recruiting trail this year. You want to have players who love to compete at the highest level, and that's what Nebraska is all about. You want players who want to be here and you want players who want to be a part of the Nebraska tradition. That's what I believe we've got in this class.

"Here at Nebraska we'll always pick the players who want us obviously, and always pick the players with the best profile for this program, and always pick the players who give us the best chance to win. This class is a little bit different in some respects. It will make us a better football team throughout the year and as we head into next season. We'll continually build a positive foundation and we'll continually build upon the players that we bring in here. There's no question in my mind that we've already established an excellent foundation, and this class serves as an excellent follow-up class to last year's recruiting.

"Just to address a couple of side bars to reiterate, we've addressed a couple of needs that we set out in this particular class. On offense we took one running back and four wide receivers, and they're big bodied wide receivers. I believe this is the biggest receiver class that we've had here at Nebraska. And finally, we have added eight offensive linemen. When I say eight, I want you to know that we're counting (sophomore offensive lineman) Matt Slauson. He counted forward to this particular recruiting class. So with him and (freshman offensive lineman) Jacob Hickman, who was enrolled here at mid-year and of course with (transfer offensive lineman) Victory Hanes, those are three additional offensive linemen to the ones we signed here today.

"We took four defensive linemen, one linebacker and five defensive backs. So we feel good about the overall balance of the class and I really felt that we met the Big 12 conference profile. There's no question and there's no doubt in my mind that we will be a better looking football team when we take the field in September. This is the profile of what a Big 12 football team should look like, and this class adds to that and adds to the size and dimension we're looking for.

"In addition to that I really feel like we've got the power, and the big-play production in the skilled positions. We took 11 skilled players compared to eight skill players a year ago. If you look at those positions, that being of course the running back, the wide receiver and the tight end and also the defensive back position, I really feel like we elevated our skill level in a lot of respects. Those players will certainly have an opportunity to come in and compete for a starting position, as all the players that we sign will have an opportunity to come in and compete for a starting role. Nothing has been guaranteed and nothing has been promised. Each and every player at Nebraska earns their spot and earns their right to be a starter, so all these players will have that opportunity.

"There are several players in this particular class who can impact our special teams, whether it be on the coverage unit, whether it be as a return specialist or a block specialist, there will be certain roles that we will look at closely and examine that each player can add to in terms of assisting our special teams and contributing to the success of special teams at Nebraska.

"At this point today we've signed 21 players, and those four other players that I mentioned earlier will count in the 2006 class. We're represented by ten different states, with four from Nebraska. I believe we have 15 players that hail from California over the past two classes. I think that's the most signed in the past two years. We have seven players that are originally from the state of Florida.

"The main thing today is we've continued to put our sights on the Big 12 championships and we've put ourselves in position to compete for the Big 12 and the national championship, and I think that this class really allows us to do that. The players that we signed here today can help that dream become a reality. In addition to this class, you'll also see that there are several preferred walk-ons. We really wanted to improve upon the ability to recruit walk-ons here at Nebraska.

"In-state recruiting has been of increasing importance to us as a staff. We have divided the state up in terms of recruiting areas. We just want to educate the public and the fans that assistant coaches will be responsible for their respective areas. Here's what I think is important – for a Nebraska native to come to Nebraska, it's important for them to connect with our coaches.

"The rules are now uniquely different, and a lot of walk-on players will now get lost in the mix. What I mean by that is that these players are in a position to come to Nebraska, but have not been contacted as often as we'd like. The reason for that is, to be a recruited walk-on here at Nebraska, we're only allowed to contact that player one time. If the player is eligible for financial aid, it becomes difficult to contact them. If they do come here and they are on some sort of assistance or some sort of aid, they count against your total number of 85. That's what we experienced this year with a player such as (sophomore wide receiver) Todd Peterson from Grand Island, (Neb.).

"So I put this (diagram) up here for a reason, with the purpose being that we want to extend ourselves to the state of Nebraska, with the purpose being that I want the walk-ons in the state of Nebraska to understand that I do want you here. We have 31 current walk-ons in our program right now; we had 40 in our program last fall. So I want to make a big point that walk-ons are welcome and invited. Especially with the movement to the new facility, where we can fit more players in here to be a part of the team, and we would welcome that. So I just wanted to make mention of that, to educate the coaches around the state as to why maybe we haven't recruited a particular player heavily, and that is because of limitations on contact as it relates to financial aid. As we move forward in this process I hope that all the coaches and the players understand that one specific part."

On December signee Ashlee Palmer

"Well he only can sign a letter of intent one time from my understanding. You can have the ability to sign a tender or a financial aid agreement. He elected to go elsewhere, but I don't know if that battle is over yet. We'll see. It would be an interesting scenario if it plays out. We would certainly love to have him here at Nebraska. We're doing everything possible to get him to be a part of this class."

On whether he intends to release Palmer from the letter-of-intent

"I believe the letter-of-intent becomes null-and-void should he elect to not enroll here at school. That's the information that I've received. So there is no release from my understanding."

On whether the team has had any contact with Palmer today

"We haven't had any contact today."

On the importance of having the increased size in the incoming wide receiver class

"We talked about it throughout the year and throughout the competition of play in the Big 12. If you look at Missouri, Oklahoma or Texas, they have big-bodied wide receivers and playmakers that have the ability to put themselves in position to make the big plays. And they're big targets. That's why I'm so pleased with this group of players. These guys will be looked at early here in the process and will get targeted and earmarked. I like their size, and I like their speed. They've got functional speed and they've got deep speed. They can hurt you with their big plays. It's a big target out there. You look at (transfer wide receiver) Maurice Purify and what he's done at San Francisco (Calif.) City College. There's a big playmaker right there, whether it's in the red zone, on third down, on a normal down, he's a guy who can make plays and elevate, and really help your offense come alive in situations where you may have a smaller guy.

"(Incoming freshman wide receiver) Menelik Holt is a player from St. Augustine HS in San Diego, Calif. We targeted him early, and had him in here early for the spring game, and that had a dramatic affect on his decision to come here early. He's another big, physical receiver who provides you with a mismatch. So when you put these guys on the field, whether it's (Menelik) Holt, (transfer wide receiver Tyrell) Spain or (Maurice) Purify, you've got the ability to create a mismatch somewhere along the line of scrimmage. So that's what we're trying to do and trying to take advantage of. I don't want to take anything away from our current guys, but these are players that can add to the dimension of what we're trying to get accomplished."

On Kenny Wilson

"I think it's important if you ever get an opportunity to get a big-play producer like Kenny Wilson, it's an opportunity to get some competition at that spot. We're awfully young at that spot. We have moved Leon Jackson back to running back. I had a long discussion with Leon a couple of weeks ago and he really wants to be a running back in this offense so we're going to give him that opportunity. We're going to split him up and work him in some routes as well.

"Interestingly enough, I don't think we're deep enough. Marlon (Lucky) will be the featured back along with Cody Glenn in the spring. Brandon Jackson has endured another shoulder operation this winter, so he will be rules out of spring practice. So that gives us three tailbacks to work with heading into spring drills. Having a fourth back like Kenny Wilson just adds to the depth and the value of our football team. Again, he's a great football player. He's got great speed, good hands; I like everything about Kenny Wilson. I couldn't be more pleased to have him as a part of this football team. He's shown the ability to a lot of different things with the ball, so he'll come in here and compete for a spot.

On where this recruiting class will most contribute

"The two spots that I looked at strongly were the offensive line, and our defensive backs and secondary. Those are the two areas that we targeted. We needed corners and we needed safeties, and we tried to stress those needs and we certainly met them.

"The offensive line is an area where we went out and really tried to upgrade ourselves with players like Carl Hicks and Victory Haines and of course D.J. Jones and players of that nature that really allow us to add more size, more bulk, and bigger guys. The same with Keith Williams. I went to St. Louis a couple of weeks ago and had a chance to visit with him and his dad. He's 310 pounds and he looks like he's 280. He's just a big, square long-armed guy that has all the potential in the world to be a great player. So to have him and D.J. Jones, those are big guys. They're big men. Like I said earlier, we'll look like a Big 12 team. We'll be a big football team in the fall. We added size to this team not only in the offensive line but in receiver. We added some real quality depth and speed and ability in the secondary as well."

On Bill Busch's recruiting work in California

"Bill has the unique ability to get close to an individual, and he does as thorough a job as any recruiter I've been around. He's outstanding. He really complements our staff. He's a guy that's been in California and has great ties there. He's got great relationships with the high school coaches. He knows the area and knows the schools, and knows where the good players are at from his Utah days when he recruited that area. It's been an easy transition for him to get involved with that area. He's done a great job and we couldn't be happier with the results he's produced.

"Everybody has contributed to this recruiting class. It wasn't just one guy; it's the whole staff that has generated a lot of effort in putting this class together. There's a lot of double-teaming, triple-teaming that takes place during the selling stage of recruiting. And we sell them hard to come to Nebraska. And this staff does a tremendous job at creating that buzz that gets players here."

On not signing a quarterback

"We went after one quarterback that I really liked and we just got into it too late. I was not going to get into a situation where I was just going to take a quarterback just to take one. There are a lot of great quarterbacks coming up in this class in the next year that we're excited about and that we've already visited on the road. So I'm in no rush to add another quarterback. I want to make sure that we get the right guy for us. It's a situation where we want the players that want us and if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. That's recruiting. It's not unusual. I think we've stolen a few in our past as has everyone. It all evens out.

"If there was one quarterback out there that we really liked, then we were going to go ahead and pull the trigger on it. But if not, then we weren't in any big hurry. We'd have liked to have one but it wasn't a pressing issue."

On whether he will recruit two quarterbacks next year

"That's possible. We'll take a look at the needs as they unravel and as it plays out. It's a distinct possibility."

On slowing down on junior college recruits in the future

"We'll see. I hate to make any statement that I can't guarantee. I don't know. We'll see where we're at a year from now. We'll see how injuries play into the scenarios and things of that nature. I don't have a crystal ball. There are injuries that take place. There are all kinds of circumstantial things that come up during the course of a year that determine where you're going to go. We're going to do the best we can to bring the best players to Nebraska whether its high school ranks or the junior college ranks. We'll see how the numbers play out. There are just so many things that come up that you want to be able to evaluate. So we stay flexible in that respect."

On the possibility of cornerbacks moving to safety

"I think there's a possibility that they could play both. We always start them out at corner to see what their coverage skills are like. We put them in the bump; put them in the off technique to see how they move in space. Of course, there are a lot of individual drills that we put them through to see how they tackle, to see their physicality. But overall, those guys like (Anthony) West are physical enough to play safety. So we'll just mix and match guys like Ricky Thenarse, who is just a physical, physical football player that can come down hill and blow out ball carriers. So he's going to be in a position somewhere in that back area to help us. But you know the safety position these days is so interchangeable and there's such a movement to make sure that those guys can cover. They have to be able to come down against these spread offenses and cover with corner skills. It's all relative in that respect."

On defensive back Andre Jones

"He's going to be very similar to what Zack Bowman did last year. He's a guy that can help in the corner rotation and also help in the sub packages. We play people early like Louisiana Tech that use a lot of no-back offenses, so we've got to be ready and that's easily a position he'll come into. Of course, I talked about rotation. I talked about the sub package. Let's see what he can do. Let's see what he's capable of. Nothing is going to be decided today. Nothing is etched in stone. We signed them all and the next process is to get them out of the field, work them and make these selections have credence."

On the in-state recruits

"Ben Martin is a defensive lineman from Southwest High School in Lincoln, and he's a guy that caught our eye during the course of the year. He came out and got better and he's getting bigger. He's a parallel of a young player that has a lot of potential but not quite the size yet. He's a great student. He has a great family and a great loyalty toward Nebraska. He's a player that potentially can emerge as he progresses through his years."

"Ricky Henry is, in my mind, maybe one of the best offensive linemen in the country. His technique, his attitude, his ability to make plays and be physical really caught our attention. When we turned on the films last spring it was a joke. He rolled up a lot of guys with very little effort. It was an easy decision for us to offer him a scholarship. He still has a little bit of work to do academically. We're hopeful that he can make it here at Nebraska. He's a guy that we have high regard for."

"D.J. Jones from Omaha Central is an outstanding player. His ability and his potential flashed significantly during our camps. He came to camp and worked hard and demonstrated his skills not just for one year, but for the last two years. He's a tremendous young man. He's got a solid family background, good character, great personal work ethic and we're excited about adding him to the mix. The sky is the limit for D.J. He's just an outstanding football player."

"Corey Young is a guy from Millard North. He's a guy that caught our eye and really emerged. You put him on film and you say to yourself 'Boy, if this guy was anywhere else in the country, you would recruit him just as hard.' He flashed that well as we watched him on film. He's got good play ability. He can slash, he can curve, he has good hands and he's a player that can do it all. So we're excited about his talent."

On making certain that recruits make academic eligibility requirements

"Our coaches stay on top of them. They do an excellent job of staying on top of players during the spring. The one thing I think we do an incredible job of is mapping out a plan for a particular student-athlete. If an individual needs help, then we're going to give them the help he needs to get to where he wants to get. I think our student services does an excellent job in determining early on in the process what a particular player needs to meet the clearinghouse requirements and assisting them along the way. I'm very fortunate to have a support staff like we do with Dennis LeBlanc and Katie Jewell and what they do during this process. What else can we do? Just keep encouraging them. We try to guide them and nurture them until they make it."

On how the Alamo Bowl aided in solidifying recruits

“Our reception was wonderful. The players that we recruited all watched the Alamo Bowl and they see the potential and they see the future. They’re excited about the future of Nebraska football and they want to be a part of it. And again, the way we finished and how we finished against Colorado and then against Michigan really cemented us in this process.”

On how the loss of recruiting coordinator Scott Downing affected the process

“Scott did an excellent job. It was easy to transition because he was so organized that when he did depart from here he closed some guys up and really set up the transition for Coach Wagner to come into Omaha. Again it comes back to this team recruiting environment that we pride ourselves on, so it was a very easy transition. It was easy to plug Wagner into Omaha because he had already been in contact with players like D.J. Jones and players like Ricky Henry. He had already made contact and visited with those players. With Corey Young, we had to go in there and reestablish ourselves one more time. He was here on campus and when players are here, we make a point of having each and every one of our coaches spend some time with them individually so we get to know them.”

On Brandon Jackson’s surgery

“It was his other shoulder that he had to get repaired. It probably wasn’t as severe as the other one, but it was a good time of year to get it taken care of. I think we’ve had 16 surgeries this offseason and a lot of those players will be out of spring football and I’ll try to relay that information as we move along. But a number of guys had to have surgery for things that just catch up with you, and it’s the right time of year to go in and get it repaired and go through rehab so they can get back on the field. Some will be back and some will miss spring ball.”

On Seth Jensen

“He’s got a great attitude. He is a guy that is physical and he’s relentless in his effort. And again you want to put a guy like him in a position where you can really utilize his strength. That’s the main thing we’re looking for; his run blocking ability. His ability to separate the play, that’s where he shows up. He’s got a good motor. He’s a great kid and we’re looking forward to having him here.”

On the importance of meeting with area high school coaches

“It was good to get out. I like being on the road. I like getting out there and meeting with coaches and seeing their programs. We were up in Omaha with Coach (Fred) Petitto talking to him. We saw his team work out. There were 160 players that day lifting in his weight room and it was just fun to walk around and see guys throwing some weights around and talking to him about his philosophies and his program. And I quiz the coaches a little bit about their players and what this next generation of guys are like. I just want to know. I just like to see what they’re going through and the issues that they face at the high school level. It was a great dialogue and I’m looking forward to getting out again this spring and talking with more coaches.”

On concentrating future efforts in Texas

“We’ve divided that state up pretty good with our staff. We certainly will commit to Texas. It’s a fertile ground with a lot of players and let’s face it, the population base is tremendous down there.”

On what Nebraska sells to recruits

“The No. 1 thing we tell recruits about is academics. It’s the opportunity to get a degree at the University of Nebraska. One of the most impressive things is our exhausted eligibility rates. When you go into a home and have those kinds of numbers to illustrate to a parent and a recruit, it’s big. And of course, it’s not the only thing. Kids make decisions for a lot of reasons. But that’s where it starts, and we don’t trail off in other areas of the program. We let them know that there are people that will take care of them and coach them and help them manage their career and allow them to flourish.”