

MSU-N announces 17 new Lights

George Ferguson

Thursday, February 2nd, 2012

National signing Day is all about restocking the cupboard and building up your football program. And with the list of recruits they released on Wednesday night, the Montana State University-Northern Lights certainly have done just that.

Northern head coach Mark Samson announced the signing of 17 players on Wednesday, which could be just the first wave of players to sign with Northern. Northern offensive coordinator and recruiting coordinator Kyle Samson said the Lights expect to announce another group of signees as early as later this week.

But for now, the Lights appear to have loaded up on both sides of the ball.

The Lights added 13 high school players from Montana, as well as three players from California, including one junior college transfer and one from Hawaii. The position breakdown for the group is six true offensive players, eight defensive players and three athletes who could see action on either side of the ball. Of the Montana preps, there are six Shrine Game nominees and two players who made the prestigious Great Falls Tribune Super State Team for 2011.

"We are very excited to announce the signings of these 17 student athletes," Mark Samson said. "All of them are great competitors and will represent our program very well on and off the field. These are the types of our players that we want in our program."

One Hi-Line standout is headed to Northern in Chester/J-I's Leonard Pugsley (5-10, 165). Pugsley is slated to play defensive back for the Lights, but he was an all-conference selection this season both ways for the Hawks, who reached the second round of the Class C playoffs.

Headlining the in-state recruits are a pair of Great Falls stars, two Helena High stars and a pair of players from Class B state champion Fairfield.

Northern continued its solid recruiting of Fairfield with the signing of running back/linebacker Chad Barrett (6-2, 195) and quarterback Trace Brady (5-11, 165). Barrett earned First-Team All-State honors this past season and was selected to the Shrine Game East roster for this summer. Brady followed in the footsteps of current Lights' QB Derek Lear, earning First Team All-Conference and Class B All-State honors for the state champion Eagles, who went undefeated this year.

The two Great Falls signees are GFH linebacker Tyson Patterson (6-10, 210) and CMR defensive end Tyler Craig (6-1, 210). Patterson was a Trib Super State selection, earning First-Team All-Conference and Class AA All-State honors for the Bison. He will also play on the East roster in the Shrine Game. Craig was also a First-Team All-Conference and Class AA All-State selection this past season for CMR and head coach Jack Johnson. Craig is an alternate on the East Shrine Game squad.

The Lights landed a pair of highly-touted Helena High Bengals as well. Chase Vestre (6-2, 210) was a First-Team All-Conference and All-State defensive end for the Bengals, who reached the Class AA semifinals. Vestre is also a Super State selection and will play in both the Shrine Game and Montana-North Dakota Badlands Bowl this summer. Sy Keltner (5-9, 200) was a bruising running back for the



Chester/J-I's Leonard Pugsley (throwing) was one of 17 new recruits Montana State University-Northern football team announced on Wednesday afternoon. Pugsley is slated to play defensive back for the Lights next fall.

Bengals. He ran for 1,400 yards as a junior before being sidelined with an injury for most of his senior season.

The Lights landed a prize in-state offensive lineman recruit in Miles City's Cooper Merrill (6-3, 240). Merrill was a Class A First-Team All-State selection this past season and a three-year starter for a Cowboy's team which reached the Class A state championship game in 2010. Merrill is also an alternate on the East Shrine Team. Another Class A standout on his way to Havre is Lewistown's Carson Feller (5-8, 165). Feller will play defensive back at Northern, where he earned First Team Central A and Class A All-State honors in 2011.

Northern also grabbed a pair of Class B athletes in Bigfork's Connor Coleman (6-1, 205) and Florence's Zach Newbary (5-10, 170). Coleman was a First-Team All-State selection at tight end and a two-way all-conference selection, also playing linebacker for the Vikings, who captured the 2010 Class B state title. Coleman is another Shrine Game nominee. Newbary was a three-way star for the Falcons. He started at quarterback, defensive back and punter for Florence, earning First-Team All-Conference and First-team All-State honors this past season.

Besides Pugsley, the Lights also inked a pair of Class C stars from Stanford High School in wide receiver Dylan Woodhall (5-9, 165) and linebacker Lander Ridgeway (6-0, 215). Both players earned Class C First-Team All-State in 2011, and Woodhall is headed to play for the East team in the Shrine Game.

The Lights brought in several quality out-of-state recruits, including more help on the offensive line. Zach Bangert (6-2, 260) comes to Northern from Los Medanos Junior College where he was First-Team All-Conference in California. Bangert is a center from Concord, Calif., and he played for the same junior college as two-time all-conference center Jorge Magana.

"Zach Bangert will provide us with immediate help as a transfer offensive lineman," Samson said.

Joining Bangert is tackle Pete Morales (6-2, 265) of La Habra High School in La Habra, Calif. As a senior, Morales earned First Team honors in his conference, as well as all state and all region. Also coming in from California is standout linebacker Derek Moore (6-3, 230) of Stockdale High School in Bakersfield, Calif. Moore comes to Northern from the same high school where current Lights All-American running back Stephen Silva once starred. At Stockdale, Moore earned First-team All-Conference and First-Team All-Region.

Rounding out the group is defensive end Ben Keller (6-1, 240) of Honolulu, HI. Keller was a First-Team All-Conference and All-State selection at Pac 5 High School.

"We have signed some very talented high school kids from the state of Montana as well as three from California and one from Hawaii," Samson said. "They will all be great additions to our team next fall. Some of them will have the ability to see the field early in their careers and others will definitely be guys that we will count on in a couple years from now. Some of these young men will have an impact on our team right away.

"With these 17 recruits and our three transfers that are already here on campus, we have the makings of a very good recruiting class and are excited about the potential that these young men have," Samson said. "We are close to wrapping up our recruiting for the year."

Wednesday's announcement brings Northern's recruiting class for 2012 to 20 new players. The Lights already announced two transfer offensive linemen and one linebacker last week. All three of those players are enrolled at Northern and will compete in spring drills. Samson said the Lights will announce between seven and 10 more signees by the end of the week to complete this year's recruiting class.

Lights add new talent on signing day

Recruiting Breakdown

13 from Montana; 3 from California; 1 from Hawaii.

By Position

Offense: 6; Defense: 8; Athlete: 3.

Montana Preps

Class AA: 4; Class A: 2; Class B: 4; Class C: 3