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National signing day set for today

(AP) — A few years after Mack Brown revived Darrell Royal's roundup style of recruiting at Texas, Bob Stoops is reaching into Oklahoma's past and pulling off the Lone Star State talent raids last seen by Barry Switzer.

The Sooners' undefeated national championship season was the perfect boost to help Stoops cross the Red River and go back home with verbal commitments from several top-caliber Texans.

Those promises will become official Wednesday when high school seniors sign letters of intent and fax them to the college of their choice. Oklahoma is expected to sign 15 players from Texas, nearly double its total from last year.

"Stoops has re-established Texas as a primary recruiting ground," said analyst Bobby Burton of Rivals100.com. "He did extremely well with the top-level guys, but if he takes more strides on the field next year he could get even bigger numbers from Texas."

The Sooners were hoping to have two more this year, but lost out to the Longhorns on all-around star Quan Cosby of Mart and Waco linebacker Derrick Johnson.

That pair pumped up Texas' already state-best haul and put UT either even with or ahead of OU in the mythical national recruiting race. The consensus among analysts is that the classes signed by the Longhorns and Sooners will rank among the top six in the country.

"Both teams are going to be real happy," said analyst Allen Wallace of SuperPrep.

Texas A&M is likely to be second-best in the state, followed by Texas Tech, Houston and Texas Christian.

The Cougars are the surprise team of 2001. Coach Dana Dimmel's intense efforts in the Houston area and throughout the state have paid off as 21 of his 23 expected signees are from Texas.

TCU was a major player last year as it was cruising out of a great season and heading into another. This time, the defection of coach Dennis Franchione and the graduation of star running back LaDainian Tomlinson

appears to have triggered a dropoff.

"It's not so much because they think (new coach) Gary Patterson or his staff is not capable, it's the timing of the situation," Burton said. "You look at it and you notice they lost some kids who they probably would've gotten."

The Sooners' biggest prizes from Texas include running back Donta Hickson of McKinney, receiver Brandon Jones of Texarkana Liberty-Eylau and defensive linemen Tommie Harris of Killeen Ellison and Brett Rayl of Lewisville.

OU's Lone Star crop is well-rounded, too, featuring eight defenders' and seven offensive players,

"That's unfair to the Aggies because they'll remain capable of beating Texas with the athletes they sign."

— Allen Wallace
SuperPrep recruiting guru

counting a kicker. Eight of the 22 Oklahoma signees were from Texas last year.

Wallace credited it all to Stoops, whom he said is "the most popular college coach in America" thanks to a combination of on-field smarts and warm demeanor off the field.

"Recruits view him as being fun to play for," Wallace said.

While playing for the national champion is a natural draw, Wallace believes the hurdles Oklahoma crossed to get there were just as important in the recruiting wars.

"I think the victory over Nebraska has as much to do with it as anything. That's when I looked at them moving to the next level," he said. "People understand that the national championship can come along only so often, but there are lots of superior programs. That established them as being among those elite teams."

In Royal's heyday, he threw out the welcome mat and invited all the best players from around the state to

fight for their place on the depth chart. Most did, making the Longhorns a national power and leaving them with third- and fourth-stringers who could start elsewhere in the Southwest Conference.

Things already were changing when Switzer took over OU in the early '70s. He made Texas his home away from home during recruiting season and signed the likes of Joe Washington, Billy Sims and David Overstreet, helping the Sooners dominate the Big Eight and the national rankings.

The glory days for both programs ended when they stopped bringing in top recruits.

Brown has kickstarted a revival in Austin by pumping up his talent supply, starting with better relations with high school coaches. While Stoops is making inroads in Texas, he's dominating recruiting in Oklahoma.

"The Sooners own the state of Oklahoma," Burton said. "I'd hate to be (new Oklahoma State coach) Les Miles right now and looking up at Bob Stoops and what he's got going. There's probably not enough talent in Oklahoma to go around."

As Stoops improves his footing in Texas, he can use one weapon Switzer never had: a guarantee that OU will play Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Baylor every year. That's something the Texas Big 12 schools feared when the conference was created and now, after five seasons, it appears to be coming true.

"Oklahoma will always recruit Texas fairly well. It's just a matter of how well," Wallace said. "It's perhaps more impressive now because the Longhorns have established themselves as a tough nut to crack. Mack Brown has a definite angle on keeping the best Texas prospects coming to Austin."

Burton and Wallace rank the Aggies' class somewhere in the 20s, although Wallace said the gap between A&M and Texas isn't as big as it seems.

"A&M probably is not going to get the exposure it deserves for this class and that's because of Texas," he said. "That's unfair to the Aggies because they'll remain capable of beating Texas with the athletes they sign."

Internet changes world of recruiting

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Chris Spencer is a wanted man.

The 305-pound 17-year-old supposedly was spotted in Tuscaloosa, Ala. Later, he was said to be headed to Baton Rouge, La., because he had family there. Both reports proved to be wrong.

For months, strangers phoned Spencer's home seeking information about his next destination, as many as five calls a day. He suspects he is being watched and his phones have been tapped.

Spencer isn't a fugitive. He is a senior at Madison Central High School in Mississippi and among the most coveted offensive linemen in the country.

Before Spencer announced that he would sign a letter of intent with Mississippi on Wednesday, the first day of the national signing period, he found out just how pervasive recruiting coverage has become in recent years.

"You can't make a move without people knowing what you're doing. If I go to a basketball game somewhere, it's on the Internet the next hour that I'm at this place or that place," he said.

Not long ago, college football fans had few sources of information on which players were being recruited by their favorite teams. Now, fans can surf through a tidal wave of recruiting facts, stats and hearsay on the Internet.

"There is more awareness by everyone of what you're doing" said Ole Miss coach David Cutcliffe, who has been recruiting for 20 years. "It is much more of a spectator sport."

Scott McKinney, co-host of a syndicated talk-radio show that focuses on Southeastern Conference sports, said the dramatic increase in recruiting coverage is directly linked to the Internet boom.

Kentucky fires football coach amid controversy

LEXINGTON, Ky. (AP) — Kentucky football coach Hal Mumme resigned Tuesday following months of investigation into possible NCAA violations.

Mumme was replaced by Guy Morriss, an assistant coach at Kentucky with more than 15 years of NFL playing and coaching experience. Morriss was given a one-year contract, athletic director Larry Ivy said at a news conference.

"I met with coach Hal Mumme this afternoon and officially accepted his resignation as head football coach," Ivy said.

The move came the day before high school players are allowed to sign letters of intent with college programs.

"There are two things that are of utmost importance to me," Ivy said. "Number one is the welfare of our current student athletes. We've spoken with them on a couple of occasions."

"I was equally concerned about potential student athletes that had committed to us. I did not want to wait until after signing day and then have the decision made, putting them in a position where they felt like they didn't have a choice."

Mumme had four years remaining on a contract that paid him \$800,000 per year. Ivy said the school did not buy out the contract but would negotiate some kind of severance package with Mumme.

Mumme was 20-26 in four seasons with the Wildcats. He has made no public comment since the school began an internal investigation in November regarding recruiting.

Mumme is expected to issue a statement on Wednesday.

"While not admitting to any NCAA violations, he felt that the problems we had encountered with our football program were under his watch, and he felt like he should shoulder the responsibility for

those problems," Ivy said.

Former assistant coach and recruiting coordinator Claude Bassett in January admitted sending \$1,400 in money orders to a Memphis, Tenn., high school football coach and improperly cashing a \$500 check donated by a booster to help fund Mumme's summer football camp.

"While not admitting to any NCAA violations, he felt that the problems we had encountered with our football program were under his watch and he felt like he should shoulder the responsibility for those problems."

— Larry Ivy
Kentucky athletic director

Ivy told the school's board of trustees last month that the investigation had uncovered several violations, some of which would be deemed major by the NCAA. He said at the time there had been no evidence linking Mumme to any of the violations.

Since that announcement, several newspaper reports said that Kentucky assistant coaches had asked boosters for money to help pay for recruits to attend Mumme's football camps, a violation of NCAA rules. The school could not provide proof that nearly 20 recruits, including Kentucky Mr. Football Montrell Jones, paid the fee to attend Mumme's camp last summer.

Ivy said he did not ask for Mumme's resignation during a meeting early Tuesday.

"We talked in general about where the program was and where he thought it could go if he continued," Ivy said. "I think it was more of a mutual understanding that a change would probably be best for all concerned."

Morriss has spent the last four seasons at Kentucky after one year at Mississippi State. An All-Southwest Conference guard at Texas Christian Morriss played 15 seasons in the NFL — 11 in Philadelphia and four with New England.

Morriss coached with New England and Arizona in the NFL and had stints at Valdosta State and San Antonio of the Canadian Football League.

The 48-year-old Mumme was a virtually unknown head coach at Division II Valdosta State when he was hired by former athletic director C.M. Newton in 1997 to replace Bill Curry, who was fired after a 26-52 record in seven years at Kentucky.

An offensive innovator, Mumme brought with him a wide-open passing attack that showcased the talents of quarterback Tim Couch. Under Mumme, Couch rewrote the Southeastern Conference record book and became the top pick in the 1999 NFL draft.

"Mummeball," as his aggressive style of play became known, ignited renewed fan interest in languishing program. Following a 5-6 record in his first season, the Wildcats went 7-5 and 6-6 the next two years and played in back-to-back bowl games — a feat accomplished only twice previously in the 109-year history of the program.

After boasting that his squad was ready to challenge perennial Southeastern Conference powers Florida and Tennessee entering the 2000 season, the Wildcats lost their final eight games to finish 2-9.

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