

Vols Claim No. 1 Recruiting Class

Written by Randy Chambers
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Tennessee head coach Butch Jones should be considered the offseason Coach of the Year for the job he has done with the 2014 recruiting class. For the first time in what seems like forever, the Volunteers are no longer looking up to the rest of their SEC peers. In fact, many respectable recruiting sites have them sitting at the top of college football.

Rivals, Scout and 247Sports have moved Tennessee to No. 1 in recruiting class rankings.

ESPN is the only site that hasn't bought into the hype just yet, but Tennessee is still in a solid position at No. 4 behind only Michigan, Alabama and Florida State.

These rankings are a big difference from last season, when 247Sports had Tennessee ranked 10th in the SEC. In 2012, Tennessee had the eighth-best recruiting class in the conference, which included not a single 5-star recruit, per 247Sports.

Now, the Volunteers have 24 commitments before the month of August. This includes a 5-star athlete in Jalen Hurd, 4-star linebackers Dillon Bates and Chris Weatherd, as well as a pair of 4-star safeties in Todd Kelly and Cortez McDowell.

Tennessee has done a good job of landing in-state kids, with five commitments coming from Tennessee recruits. But the coaching staff has also done a wonderful job of going into rival territory and snagging a few key players. Three players have come from Florida, four from Georgia and linebacker Gavin Bryant is from Alabama.

This success is impressive for a guy who coached at Central Michigan and Cincinnati before taking on this high-profile job. Competing with elite programs for top recruits isn't something Jones had to do very often, but he is proving that he is more than capable of holding his own. However, dominating a recruiting class isn't the same as winning games and competing for SEC Championships. Nobody will remember this success if Tennessee doesn't earn a bowl berth. Jones also needs to make sure these players sign on the dotted line come national signing day. There is also no guarantee a lot of these players are going to pan out, and it certainly takes more than one great class to climb out of the SEC cellar.

However, all success in college football begins with getting recruits to believe in your program and commit for one cause (winning). If this is a sign of things to come, Tennessee is in great hands, and the fans can't stop smiling.

Photo Courtesy: Butch Jones, Tennessee Athletics