

Future looks bright: Akey excited with new recruits

By Sandra Kelly, Daily News staff writer

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The future's so bright Idaho football fans need to wear shades.

Idaho coach Robb Akey had a banner Letter of Intent Day on Wednesday, inking "some who will play right off the bat, and many who will redshirt."

In what's become Idaho style, Akey and his coaches recruited mainly from the high-school level, but added a few junior college recruits to help fill some immediate voids.

The biggest void is on the offensive line where the Vandals lost four starters, including All American Mike Iupati.

Sam Tupua and Charles Wiley are two junior college linemen who will provide speed and strength and bulk to the Idaho line.

Tupua was a center and guard at Palomar Junior College in California, while Wiley was a tackle at Grossmont College in California, and Akey said they should challenge for starting jobs this spring.

Mike Marboe of Wenatchee High School was a player Akey said they wanted when he was a junior. He was recruited by a handful of schools, but between a rich family tradition and the good feel he had while visiting, he not only signed with Idaho, but got through his high school requirements early and is now on campus.

"His daddy played here, his granddaddy played here, his cousin plays here. He toured a number of schools during the spring and summer and settled on this place," Akey said. "Said it felt like home to him."

Akey said all three recruits will have a chance to play right off the bat, and he expects great competition at the newly vacated slots.

"We have a chance to be a pretty good football team next year," Akey said. "We need to add some competition to our offensive line with four guys to replace. We challenged them to come and win jobs, and we challenged the guys here to win jobs."

Idaho also added to its secondary, signing three defensive backs and a linebacker.

"We added to our secondary, both in physicality and speed, as well as depth," Akey said.

Thaad Thompson is a 6-foot-3, 215-pound safety from Ellsworth Community College in Florida who could earn a job right off the bat.

"He has great speed and is very physical," Akey said. "He's physical enough he could be a linebacker, but he should compete for a starting job at safety."

Locally, Idaho landed some big fish.

The largest fish is Justin Podrabsky, a 6-6, 230-pound quarterback from Lewiston.

Podrabsky is a three-sport athlete who was recruited by Pac-10 schools to play tight end, but chose Idaho because he wants to be a quarterback.

"I think he'll be a very good quarterback," Akey said. "He's a big guy with a rocket of an arm. He's got a whole future in front of him. ... He'll gain so much more as he learns his position - he's very raw in that respect. He has good leadership, is a first-class student. I can't find anyone to say anything bad about the guy, and I tried."

Jesse Davis, a defensive end/tight end out of Asotin, is the first ... in years to sign with the Vandals, and Akey said the 6-6, 265-pound end will do well on defense.

Moscow's Jayson Williams will bring speed and deftness to Idaho's running back group.

"We got Moscow's finest. The kid's been making plays in this town for a long time," Akey said. "He's a kid that's short but has rocket speed. (In high school) everyone knew he was the guy that would get the ball and he still did it. He'll add speed to our football team. He's a good playmaker. ... He's an exciting player to watch."

Demetrius Williams, of Sacramento, should also bring speed to the Vandals.

"He's great with the ball in his hands," Akey said. "I look at his hands and the way he runs with the football - he's going to be an exciting part of our future."

Idaho recruited 15 players from the northwest, four from Florida, one from Texas and one from Arizona.

Now that signing day is over, Akey said he's going to focus on getting a quarterback's coach to replace Jonathan Smith, who went to Montana to be the offensive coordinator and work on getting his contract settled.

"I expect to have someone in the next two weeks," Akey said. "I felt it was important to pay attention to this class. ... I hope this is the only way I lose coaches - to grow out of their career. ... I do expect for (my) contract to get taken care of. We're in negotiations, and I expected to get that cleaned up shortly."

Only two players won't be returning to Idaho, Michael Terry and Denzel Wedgeworth. Akey said he doesn't ever like to lose players, but added the good thing is both did well in school and Idaho won't be dinged.

Overall, Akey said he and his staff are thrilled with who they have and are looking forward to spring ball.

"Every coach in the country is excited about who they are signing today," he said. "And we are, for good reason. We're finishing a year of hard work. They're all kids we hold in high regard. They're all kids who will help us continue to build and carry on what we have started here at the University of Idaho." **Sandra Kelly** can be reached at (208) 882-5561, ext. 231, or by e-mail at skelly@dnews.com.