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Fence posts planted in state despite losing Brown

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If you're keeping score, Tennessee went 5-for-6 on its home turf on National Signing Day.

The Vols signed five in-state prospects in their 2009 class, and swiped Henry County athlete Marsalis Teague from rival Florida. They withstood a late push from Auburn to sign Memphis linebacker Greg King.

Early in coach Lane Kiffin's tenure, he swung Nashville cornerback Eric Gordon, and a pair of longtime UT commitments - Rhea County offensive lineman Kevin Revis and Nashville wide receiver Zach Rogers - never wavered.

As far as fence-building goes, Wednesday's haul qualifies as a little more than just digging post holes.

UT's lone miss on an in-state prospect was wide receiver Marlon Brown, who opted for Georgia over Tennessee and Ohio State.

"The statement that I made was that we were going to put a fence around the state of Tennessee," Kiffin said, referring to comments he made during his introductory press conference two months ago.

"Basically every kid that we offered that we continued to recruit in-state through this process we signed, except for Marlon."

Brown, one of the top receivers in the nation and the News Sentinel's top prospect in Tennessee, has the height and athleticism that Kiffin covets in a wideout. But his decision, unlike other Memphis prospects in the past, had little to do with geography.

"Marlon called last night and said that he loved it here, but his grandmother wouldn't let him come," Kiffin said. "I don't know what you do about that. Other than that, I thought that we did a great job in-state."

Teague, who swapped Tennessee for Florida on Wednesday as did Pahokee, Fla., receiver Nu'Keese Richardson, was one of the day's biggest surprises.

At least on the outside.

Teague said the Vols became the clear choice ahead of Florida and Alabama in the last few days. UT's new staff had a lot to do with that, he said.

"With all due respect to the last staff, if they were still there, I probably wouldn't be going to the University of Tennessee," Teague said. "The new staff came in with so much energy, it opened my eyes to a different part of Tennessee."

That energy is part of UT assistant head coach and recruiting coordinator Ed Orgeron's plan for landing prospects, much like the one he helped implement at Southern California.

"I think that Coach Kiffin has done a great job of hiring some guys that are high energy and some guys that are a little higher energy," Orgeron said.

That energy certainly helped sway King.

The 6-foot-3, 200-pound linebacker was the first prospect Monte Kiffin visited after joining his son's staff as defensive coordinator. That initial visit helped land King in Knoxville - and showed Orgeron something about the elder Kiffin, too.

"We were there at 5:30 (a.m.) at Melrose High School. I couldn't get (Kiffin) out there until 11, because it's like walking into the building with Elvis," Orgeron said. "The reason Greg King is at Tennessee is because of Monte Kiffin."

Lane Kiffin made it clear that his first recruiting class as UT's coach isn't what he expects in the future.

"Understand this class is far below the standards that we have here and what will be here in the future," he said. "But with the time frame that we had, we're very excited about the way it ended up."

And much of that success, especially in-state, could rest in Memphis.

"We need to make it closer somehow, but I don't know how we're going to do that," Kiffin joked. "It's out there."

Kiffin, though, plans to counter distance with more of his recruiting coordinator's energy.

"We put Ed over there in Memphis," he said. "He's got experience there, and I know we're going to do a great job now that we have time to build relationships there."

"We've got to get those kids over to camp. We've got to get (coaches) speaking in clinics. We've got to make them feel part of us. It is over there, and there's somewhat of a feeling that it's not part of Tennessee. We've got to do our best to change that."



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