Putting it together

National Letter of Intent Day brings together Penn State football class of 2008

Max Emfinger resides in New Orleans and is a 25-year veteran of player evaluation and scouting. He has been involved with high school, college and professional recruiting throughout his career. In the 1980's, he worked for the Dallas Cowboys as a talent scout and now is the proprietor of maxemfingerrecruiting.com, one of the nation's leading recruiting databases.

Emfinger summed up this year's recruiting class for Penn State and made some predictions of his own for the future of the Nittany Lions' program.

"This is a heck of a class," he said. "Penn State's recruiting started like a house of fire and it started out real good. I wouldn't say it's not good now, but they were able to get a lot of big name players early on."

Penn State's linebackers and offensive lineman in its 2004 class are what Emfinger said are the highlights of an otherwise solid class.

"Harrison, Cadogan, Varva and Bowman, that's about a good a group of lineman I the country," Emfinger said.

Emfinger's Blue Chip Prospects

Dan Connor - LB
Greg Harrison - OL
Spencer Ridenhour - DB
Tyrell Sales - DE / LB
A.Q. Shipley - DT

Emfinger's Four Star Prospects

Wyatt Bowman - OL
Dontey Brown - LB
Gerald Cadogan - OL
Tony Davis - DB
Matt Hahn - FB
Jed Hill - TE
Dan Lawlor - FB
Mike Lucian - DE
Mark Rubin - WR
Trent Varva - OL

TOP CATCH

Dan Connor - LB

"He never comes off the field. If you didn't know he was an All-American linebacker, you'd think he was an All-American fullback. He's super intense, a great leader and has great work ethic. He just runs over people on both sides of the ball. You can't help but like this guy."

MOST UNDERRATED PROSPECT

Elijah Robinson - DT

"Last year, how Tulane found him was a fluke. The people down here didn't understand how good he is. He's unbelievable. The guy can run and he has the ability to become a great college football player. He was Tulane's best recruit last year, but I don't think a lot of people still know who he is."

SLEEPER PROSPECT

Paul Cianciolo - QB

"I haven't seen him play or seen him on video, so I honestly don't know a lot about him."

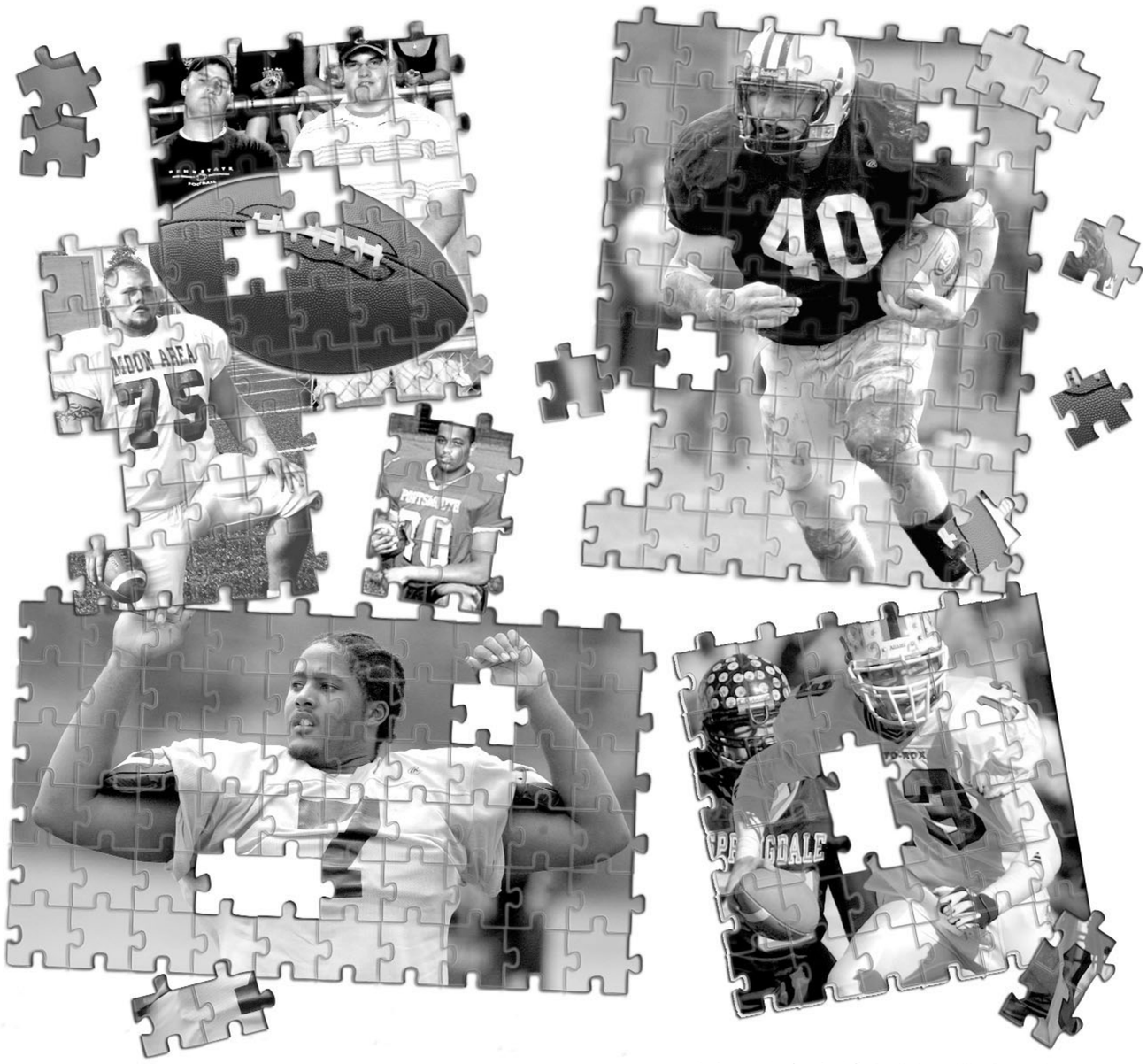

Photo clockwise from top left: Greg Harrison and Wyatt Bowman, photo courtesy of Joseph Rokita - PSU Playbook; Dan Connor, photo courtesy of Laurence Kesterson - Philadelphia Inquirer; Adam DiMichele, photo courtesy of The Pittsburgh Tribune Review; Tyrell Sales, photo courtesy of the Pittsburgh Tribune Review; Gerald Cadogan (70), photo courtesy of Max Emfinger; A.Q. Shipley, photo courtesy of Max Emfinger.

Page Designed by Beth Allison. Content compiled by Rob Riva, Wade Malcolm and Derek Levarse

Wyatt Bowman - OL - 6'6" - 314

Mechanicsbrg, Pa. - Cumberland Valley H.S.

Massive lineman who possesses surprising agility and quickness for his size. Clocked a 5.0 in the 40. Has ability to play either guard or tackle in college. Is a fundamentally strong blocker.

Top 30 overall Pa. prospect
Top five OL Pa. prospect

Dontey Brown - LB - 6'3" - 250

Pittsburgh, Pa. - McKeesport H.S.

Projected linebacker but has size, ability to play rush end. One of the WPIAL's most explosive defensive players. Recorded 150 tackles, 15 for loss and six sacks in his junior year. Quickness for his size suggests that he may line up as Will linebacker.

First team WPIAL Quad A All-Conference
Pittsburgh Tribune-Review All-WPIAL pick
Top 15 overall Pa. prospect

Gerald Cadogan - OL - 6'8" - 305

Portsmouth, Ohio - Portsmouth H.S.

Can add weight to his tall frame, but will need to work on lower body strength to excel at next level. Quickness for his size allows him to get of the line quickly and block well downfield.

First Team All-State
All-District
All-Legion
Ohio High School Heisman Finalist

Paul Cianciolo - QB - 6'5" - 220

Fort Dorchester, S.C. - Fort Dorchester H.S.

Threw for over 2850 yards and 28 touchdowns senior season. Efficient passer, completing 55% of attempts. Owns school single season and career passing record.

ESPN's Tom Lemming's No. 1 quarterback in SC
North-South All Star Game Selection

Daryll Clark - QB - 6'3" - 193

Youngstown, Ohio - Ursuline H.S.

Mobile quarterback with strong arm. Three-year varsity starter in very competitive Ohio conference. Chance of delayed enrollment due to a grade issue, but will work out with the team this summer.

Ranked No. 24 dual-threat quarterback by rivals.com
TheInsiders Big Ten Top 100 Prospect
All-Area Selection

Dan Connor - LB - 6'3" - 225

Wallingford, Pa. - Strath Haven H.S.

One of the top overall prospects in the nation. Hard hitting and intense linebacker. Enrolled early at Penn State and should start 2004 season at middle linebacker. Rushed for over 1700 yards and 23 touchdowns as a fullback in 2002.

No. 2 middle linebacker by rivals.com
Parade All-America
Two-time first team AP All-State
Maxwell Award

Tony Davis - DB - 5'11" -180

Warren, Ohio - Howland H.S.

4.4 speed makes him best pure cornerback in this class. Totaled 14 career INTs, including three his senior year to go with 48 tackles. Also scored 20 touchdowns on offense as a running back.

AP Ohio Division II Offensive Player of the Year
Trumbull County Player of the Year
First Team All-League

Adam DiMichele - DB - 6'1" - 179

McKees Rocks, Pa. — Sto-Rox H.S.

All-time WPIAL passing leader, totaling 6,471 yards in his career, but projected as a defensive back in college. Has possibility of playing baseball at Penn State.

AP Class A First-team selection
AP Class A Player of the Year

Josh Gaines - DE - 6'3" - 255

Ft. Wayne, Ind. - Northrop H.S.

Ranked as a top 25 defensive end nationally by Rivals and The Insiders. Projects as defensive lineman in college, but could play tight end. Had a 110 tackles and five sacks as a junior.

AP Class 5A All-State
Two Time All-League

Matt Hahn - RB - 6'1" - 218

Long Island, N.Y. - St. Anthony's H.S.

A fast and physical back who says he plays with a style similar to Larry Johnson. As a senior, rushed for 1,368 on 141 carries for a gaudy 9.7-yard average. First player to verbal in this class.

New York Daily News Player of the Year
AP State Player of the Year
Two Time All-State
Two Time All-Long Island

Greg Harrison - OL - 6'5" - 295

Shenandoah, Pa. - Shenandoah Valley S.H.S.

Dominating and smart lineman who enrolled at Penn State semester early. Committed to the Nittany Lions at the Blue-White game in 2003. Four-year varsity starter. Actively recruited many of the other commitments in the 2004 class.

No. 6 guard by rivals.com
AP First Team All-State - Small School

Jed Hill - TE - 6'4" - 245

Struthers, Ohio - Struthers H.S.

Only true tight end recruit in Penn State's class. Missed most of junior season due to injuries. Gym fanatic who works out six days a week. Converted from fullback before his injury, but coaches like his catching ability.

Bench presses 390 lbs.
Leg press of 890 lbs.
34-inch vertical leap

Austin Hinton - OL - 6'4" - 298

Secaucus, N.J. - Secaucus H.S.

Earned early scholarship offer after impressing coaches at the Penn State summer football camp. Athletic ability and quickness is there, but will need to get bigger and stronger. Projected as an offensive guard.

All-State
All-Area
All-League
All-County

Patrick Humes - K - 5'9" - 160

Gibsonia, Pa. - Pine-Richland H.S.

Passed on a scholarship offer to Connecticut to walk-on at Penn State. Kicked 13 field goals and 124 extra points and was ranked the No. 29 kicker in the country by Rivals.

Jonathon Jackson - DB - 6'1" - 180

Philadelphia, Pa. - West Catholic H.S.

Was originally a member of last year's recruiting class, but had to sit out in the fall while getting treated for an aneurysm. Not cleared as of yet to play football.

All-State
All-Catholic League

Dan Lawlor - FB - 6'3" - 245

Mechanicsburg, Pa. - Cumberland Valley H.S.

Benching over 300 pounds, already has the body to play college ball. Could add a little speed to a 4.6 40-yard dash time. Also started at linebacker.

Three Time All-State
Three Time All-Conference
Three Time All-League

Mike Lucian - DE - 6'3" - 250

Frederick, Md. - Liganore H.S.

Played on both sides of the ball as a tight end and defensive end, but will play on defense at Penn State.

Two-time All-State pick

Jordan Lyons - QB/TE - 6'5" - 220

College Park, Ga. - Woodward Academy

Recruited as quarterback and tight end by numerous programs. Will get a shot to play quarterback for the Lions but will likely end up at tight end due to lack of depth at the position.

Georgia Varsity Player of the Week

Richard Ohrnberger - OL - 6'3" - 275

East Meadow, N.Y. - East Meadow H.S.

Wasn't rated highly by many services, but New York prospects tend to get less respect than they deserve. Could be the sleeper of this year's class. Finishes blocks well.

Tom Thorp Award for Nassau County Player of the Year
Matrone Award for Nassau County Lineman of the Year
Two Time All-County

Spencer Ridenhour - DB - 6'1" - 210

White Plains, N.Y. - White Plains H.S.

Given scholarship after Penn State football camp this summer and finished as the camp's top safety. Very physical and hard hitting prospect who will likely end up as a strong safety.

Two Time All-State
Two Time All-League

Elijah Robinson - DT - 6'3" - 300

Camden, N.J. - Woodrow Wilson H.S.

Pursued by Penn State last year, but ultimately committed to Tulane. Never enrolled at Tulane in an attempt to raise SAT score. Committed to Penn State this year after improving academics and is currently enrolled this semester. Could provide an immediate inside presence to defensive line.

Philadelphia Inquirer second team All-South Jersey selection
Prep-Star All-Region team
Part of a 15-0 state championship team in junior year

Mark Rubin - WR - 6'4" - 210

Buffalo, N.Y. - Amherst Central H.S.

Big receiver will present matchup problems. One of New York State's best all time high school receivers. No. 2 in receptions and receiving yards all time in New York, trailing only current Arizona Cardinal Marquise Walker.

No. 64 recever by rivals.com
First Team All-State

Tyrell Sales - DE/LB - 6'4" - 235

Pittsburgh, Pa. - Butler H.S.

Accomplished and heavily recruited high school linebacker, but likely projects as a strong-side defensive end because of size and Penn State's depth at linebacker. Senior year numbers suffered on a mediocre Butler team, but is an outstanding athlete who also excels academically.

All-WPIAL selection
One of the top five prospects in Pa.
One of the top linebackers in the nation

Jimmy Shaw - DE - 6'4" - 260

Spring Grove, Pa. - Spring Grove H.S.

Transferring from Rice and currently attending branch campus with intention of attending University Park this summer. Older brother of defensive tackle John Shaw, a Penn State recruit from last year. Played in every game last season at Rice. Has possibility of playing linebacker.

Led H.S. team to YAIAA Division I title
York Daily Record's Division I Player of the Year

A.Q. Shipley - DT - 6'2" - 280

Coraopolis, Pa. - Moon Area H.S.

Received 41 scholarship offers, but felt most comfortable in Happy Valley. One of the top recruits in the state. Possesses impressive foot speed for a lineman. Doesn't excel in any one area, but is a solid all-around player. Four-star recruit, per rivals.com. One of the highest rated recruits in this year's Penn State class.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Fabulous 22
Pittsburgh Tribune-Review Terrific 25
AP First-team Pa. Class AAA All-State

Kevin Suhey - QB/DB - 6'2" - 195

State College, Pa. - State College H.S.

Local product who led Little Lions to the PIAA Quad A semifinals. Likely to "greyshirt" this season, meaning he will not enroll until January 2005 and will not count against Penn State's scholarship count until then. Had a completion percentage above 60 at State High but may move to safety at Penn State.

Led team to PIAA Class AAAA semifinals
Led team to District 6 Class AAAA title

Trent Varva - OL - 6'3" - 320

Lake Orion, Mich. - Lake Orion H.S.

Was overlooked by Michigan for being "too short." Lack of size aside, explodes well off the line of scrimmage. Projects as an offensive guard.

Two Time All-State
Two Time All-Area
Two Time All-League

rivals.com Top 25 Pa. class of 2004 prospects

Anthony Morelli	- QB - undecided
Chad Henne	- QB - Michigan
Dan Connor	**- LB - Penn State**
Kyle Mitchum	- OL - Ohio State
James Bryant	- LB - undecided
Tyrell Sales	**- LB - Penn State**
Andrew Johnson	- RB - Pittsburgh
A.Q. Shipley	**- DT - Penn State**
Greg Harrison	**- OL - Penn State**
Chris Rogers	- LB - Michigan
Corey Davis	- LB - Pittsburgh
Rory Nicol	- TE - Ohio State
Jordan Steffy	- QB - Maryland
Devon Lyons	- DB - undecided
Anthony Heygood	- RB - undecided
Craig Bokor	- DT - Pittsburgh
Ryan Purvis	- TE - Boston College
Chris Crane	- QB - Boston College
Adam Gunn	- DB - Pittsburgh
Scott McKillop	- LB - Pittsburgh
Dan Lawlor	**- FB - Penn State**
Kevin Akins	- DB - Boston College
Wyatt Bowman	**- OL - Penn State**
Dontey Brown	**- LB - Penn State**
Darrelle Revis	- DB - Pittsburgh

Expect Morelli to join already solid Penn State incoming class

By Rob Riva

MY OPINION

The list of commitments to the Penn State football isn't quite complete yet.

There's at least one name missing from the incoming group.

Penn Hills quarterback Anthony Morelli, one of the nation's top overall prospects and strongest arms, has yet to officially name the college that will receive his services next season as of press time.

Whether he ends up making that final list of Nittany Lions' freshman for the 2004 season remains to be seen.

Morelli, who committed to Pittsburgh in August, has since rescinded his verbal commitment and took an official visit to Penn State two weeks ago. As of Monday evening, Morelli made his decision between the Lions and Panthers, but will wait until this morning to make it public.

From a historical perspective, Penn State fans should have every reason to believe Morelli will choose the Lions.

Over the last few years, numerous high school prospects that have verbally committed to a program and then gone elsewhere on official visits almost always decommit from their original choice.

It's gone both ways for Penn State; the program has lost players and gained players.

Levi Brown originally committed to Virginia Tech, took an official visit to Happy Valley, then chose Penn State. Both Donnie Johnson and J.R. Zwierzynski initially chose Illinois but after visiting Penn State became Nittany Lions. Josh Hannum is a Notre Dame decommit as is Lavon Chisley of Maryland. All changed their minds after making a trip to Penn State.

It also works the other way.

Last year, highly recruited Georgia running back Jason Evans committed very early on to the Nittany Lions, but ultimately signed with Stanford after taking a visit to Palo Alto.

> "From a historical perspective, Penn State fans should have every reason to believe Morelli will choose the Lions."

So where will Morelli ultimately end up?

Quite frankly, I don't know.

And if anyone tells you that they know, whether it be with 100, 99 or 98.6 percent certainty, chances are they are full of it.

But if you're one for unsubstantiated rumors and Internet gossip, the word is Morelli has selected Penn State.

Hold your applause because until the letter of intent is signed, and faxed to Joe Paterno, nothing is official.

Still, if Morelli indeed becomes a Nittany Lion, he will be a final piece to an otherwise unprecedented 2004 recruiting class. Even if he sticks with Pittsburgh, the Lions' 2004 recruiting class remains solid nonetheless. Either way, there are certain contexts that need to be remembered when considering what an amazing feat it was to put together a class of this caliber.

First, didn't Penn State finish 3-9 just recently? Yes.

And isn't Joe Paterno obsolete on the recruiting trail? Apparently not.

Let's assume that the Lions don't finish with a top-10 class nationally. Worst case scenario, let's assume that Penn State, heaven forbid, lands with a top-15 class instead. All things considered, the recruiting class of 2004 is nothing short of stellar.

To make a comparison, look at another program that has mimicked Penn State's fall from grace in football recently: Notre Dame.

The Fighting Irish ended the season better off than Penn State did. Notre Dame finished 5-7 and has since been unable to recruit a highly touted class of incoming freshmen.

According to rivals.com, Notre Dame's 16 commitments garner it a weak No. 34 ranking nationally. The Fighting Irish were passed up by numerous blue chip prospects including Brian Brohm who went to Louisville and Dan Connor to Penn State.

Penn State's recruiting ability has this year proven versatile while Notre Dame's has stumbled.

Regardless, keep in mind that once these incoming prospects reach campus, a handful will fade into obscurity. Another handful will go on to become solid contributors to the Penn State football program. A fraction will go on to the next level.

Morelli might be one of them.

Connor might be one of them.

Then again, they might not.

Rob Riva is a senior majoring in psychology and is a Collegian recruiting writer. His e-mail address is **rer158@psu.edu**.