

SEC coaches want early football signing day

By Ron Higgins

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DESTIN, Fla. -- Southeastern Conference football coaches passed a measure Wednesday calling for the league to propose a national one-day early signing period for high school prospects.

Recruits who haven't taken an official visit to a school but who have committed to that school would be eligible to sign national letters-of-intent on the Monday before Dec. 1.

Unlike basketball, which has an early signing period in October, football has but one signing period, starting on the first Wednesday in February.

The SEC proposal, which passed by a 9-3 vote among football coaches here on the second day of the annual league spring business meetings, is expected to be approved Friday by the presidents and chancellors of the 12 SEC schools. Then, the league will take the proposal to the NCAA for approval.

"If a kid knows what he wants to do, then let him sign early," Ole Miss coach Houston Nutt said. "You don't want to add a visit. You don't want to add contacts. When he signs, it's one less worry. He's on the dotted line and he's done, instead of a coach trying to guard the chicken and make sure nobody steals the eggs."

Mississippi State coach Sylvester Croom, chairman of the league football coaches, said the proposal makes sense.

"A lot of these kids have already been to our campus on unofficial visits, they've seen our academic counselors and they've seen everything on our campus they've needed to see," Croom said. "They want to get signing out of the way."

"Now, we don't have to call that kid every day or go to that kid's high school every week. We can be recruiting somebody else."

A recent survey conducted by the American College Football Coaches Association revealed 70 percent of head coaches favor an early signing period for high school recruits. Grant Teaff, executive director of the AFCA, said that the AFCA survey indicated that schools have an average of 13.2 commitments by mid-December.

Teaff also said the AFCA survey of every state high school association favor of an early signing date.

Alabama coach Nick Saban said he is a longtime proponent of an early signing period in some form. But he added that he really likes what he and his fellow league coaches

have formulated.

"I think this is the best concept we could have, because it minimizes most concerns," Saban said. "I'm for it, but all coaches are paranoid. They'll have to go back and digest this, and figure out if this is an advantage for this school or that school. But the rule would be the same for everybody."

LSU coach Les Miles said signing early eases the pressure on the signee.

"If a kid knows that he always wanted to go to LSU, he signs and he knows he has a scholarship," Miles said. "It allows that kid to go ahead and concentrate on his winter sport in high school, whether it is basketball or wrestling. After he signs, the kid can still take an official paid visit."

Miles said an early signing day also helps a coach simplify his recruiting.

"You know who you've signed early, so you recruit to your remaining needs," Miles said.

There's the feeling from most coaches that they could sign at least half of their recruiting class with an early signing date.

"Last year, we probably had 18 or 20 guys committed halfway through football season," Saban said. "If half of those guys could have signed early, then we wouldn't have had to keep pursuing them."

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