

Has Beavers football become Transfer Portal U?

OSU could start as many as 12 transfers this fall

By NICK DASCHEL
The Oregonian

CORVALLIS — Four years into coach Jonathan Smith's Oregon State tenure, the Beavers have beefed up their football roster with 19 transfers from FBS or FCS schools.

They're not just practice fodder, either. Fourteen come from Power 5 schools, including notable programs like Georgia, Penn State, Florida State and Oklahoma.

Nine were former 4-star high school recruits. The 19 transfers combined to play 230 games and start 76 times at their previous school. Three earned an all-conference honor at least one time at their previous stop.

The result is that as many as 12 transfers could start Oregon State's Sept. 4 season opener at Purdue.

Smith was a little surprised to hear that number, but on the other hand, not really. The transfer portal is a tool OSU has frequently used since it became a thing in 2018.

"I will say, we were pretty aggressive once it got up and going," Smith said. "You think about a guy from high school who goes to a school, and that's not the right fit. The next time, the next place, it's going to be about a football decision. If you think about football, and coaching, style and play, we've got a lot to sell to guys."

Which Oregon State transfers are in play for starting jobs this fall? It's all over the field.

At quarterback, Tristan Gebbia (Nebraska) and Sam Noyer (Colorado) are leading candidates. Directly behind them at running back is Deshaun Fenwick (South Carolina). The offensive line could have as many as three transfers in Nathan Eldridge (Arizona), Brandon Kipper (Hawaii) and Heneli Bloomfield (Utah State).

The starting three receivers are difficult to project, but four transfers are in play in Tre'Shaun Harrison (Florida State), Makiya Tongue (Georgia), John Dunmore Jr. (Penn State) and Tyjon Lindsey (Nebraska).

On defense, four transfers are starting candidates, and some likely, in outside linebacker Addison Gumbs (Oklahoma), inside linebacker Avery Roberts (Nebraska), defensive tackle Keonte Schad (Minnesota) and cornerback Elijah Jones (Kansas).

Others are in line for significant playing time, such as offensive guard Korbin Sorensen (Portland State) and inside linebacker Kyrei Fisher (Arkansas).

Roberts, who transferred to Oregon State just before NCAA transfer portal rules were put in place, said there's a primary reason OSU is attractive to transfer candidates.

"It's opportunity," Roberts said. "They were rebuilding and there was an opportunity to play for a lot of guys who are able to play at their school or start at their school."

Roberts said Oregon State has delivered on opportunity.

"I just wanted to play. I felt like the coaches had my best interest at heart," Roberts said. "It's a good school. You can focus on football and gives everything you need to do what you want to do."

Smith began cultivating the transfer market months into his arrival in Corvallis, and even had success before the portal became official Oct. 15, 2018. Gebbia, Roberts, Gumbs and Lindsey all moved to OSU under old transfer rules before the portal was official. All have started at some point during their careers.



Amanda Loman/The Associated Press, File
Oregon State quarterback Ben Gulbranson (17) hands off to running back Calvin Tyler Jr. (2) against Arizona State in Corvallis on Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020.

"We got some good players and it piqued our interest," Smith said.

Smith has developed protocols to work the transfer market, just like a program would with high school/junior college recruiting. Smith has a staffer who monitors the portal daily. The coaching staff regularly talks about positions where they have specific transfer needs. For example, when Ben Gulbranson hurt his shoulder late this spring and needed surgery, the staff immediately went to work looking for another quarter-

back. When Noyer became available, Smith pounced.

Smith says vetting a transfer "is hard," because it's often a quick decision. Some of the better players are often in and out of the transfer portal in less than a week.

Smith said he makes it clear to his staff not to go anywhere near the line when it comes to chasing a transfer. If a player is not in the portal, they're off limits in terms of direct contact.

"If we lose a player because we had to wait, I can live that. I'm not get-

ting involved in tampering," Smith said.

But if OSU get a heads up that a certain player might be headed to the transfer portal, the staff begins to collect background.

"It's amazing what you find on Google," Smith said.

Once Smith or one of his coaches can talk to a player, the pitch is generally about opportunity, but it's also broad. An Oregon State education is a selling point, as is the culture Smith believes he's cultivated.

"It's coaching, the scheme you're going to run, and then the history. We've had transfers here, look at how they're playing," Smith said.

Another aspect of the transfer portal is how it's received by the team. Smith understands some players might not be completely excited regarding an experienced player suddenly showing up to compete for their time. But he found a recent conversation about that subject with Roberts and cornerback Jaydon Grant to be refreshing.

"Those guys are like, 'Dude, we're always into bringing in a good player. It's going to make us better,'" Smith said.



Davis Carbaugh/The Observer

McKaylee Orton signs her letter of intent to play basketball and softball at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton on Monday, Aug. 2, 2021. Orton was named 4A all-state as an outfielder in 2021 and helped lead the La Grande girls basketball team to a 10-0 regular-season record.

ORTON

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for a championship, the pandemic forced the cancellation of the season.

"All the basketball memories and all the tournaments we went to stand out to me," Orton said. "Being able to play in the state tournament in basketball this year and winning states my sophomore year in softball are what I'll remember."

Orton will begin her collegiate career when Blue Mountain opens its season against Multnomah on Thursday, Dec. 2. Upon concluding basketball season in late February, she will transition to the diamond for opening day on Friday, March 18, against Wenatchee Valley.

According to Orton, Blue Mountain was her final decision after also considering Treasure Valley Community College. Upon meeting her future teammates and coaches at a softball tournament, she felt it was a better fit with the Timberwolves.

"They were really nice and really enthusiastic about the sport and just wanted to play and have fun."

Orton plans to major in accounting with a minor in agriculture business. The multi-talented athlete leaves behind a winning legacy in her time at La Grande.

"She wants to be the best that she possibly can and I have no doubt that she is going to be excellent at Blue Mountain," Wright said.

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