

Recruiting coordinator's tenacious efforts give Dickinson one of area's largest signing day classes

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DICKINSON

Maybe it's an impossible goal, but until it gets achieved, Dickinson Gators inside linebackers coach Rodney Strambler will not rest.

"If you're a football athlete and you're in Dickinson, you're going to college," he says.

Strambler is one of the many unsung heroes who reside at high schools across the country working behind the curtain of the circus that is National Signing Day.

As the Dickinson football program's designated recruiting coordinator, Strambler is tasked with reaching out to every college with a football program on every level of competition in the country and convincing coaches to offer athletic scholarships to his Gators football players.

"I have the contact to every DI, DI-AA, DII, DIII, NAIA and JUCO in the nation, and I have called every one of them on the telephone or on my cell, and I've emailed every single one of them," Strambler said. "Our kids are getting looked at by the nation."

On the recruiting trail

From Strambler's end, the recruiting cycle begins with collecting information on all his senior athletes — heights, weights, 40 times, lifting maxes, etc. — and dissecting hours of game footage to piece together highlight videos. All of that then gets sent to his college contacts.

"You're going to get rejected 1,000 times, but you've got



Signing day for the Dickinson Gators

Dickinson football players pose for photos after signing their letters of intent to to play college football during the school's signing day ceremony Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2016.

The 12 Dickinson players pictured who signed letters of intent are, from left, James Randle (Fort Scott College), RodJohon Dorsey (Texas A&M-Kingsville), John Littles (Texas A&M-Kingsville), Blake Carlisle (SMU), Anietie Etuk (Abilene Christian University), Jordan Myers (Rice), Kaylond North (Coffeyville College), Chance Harmanson (Coffeyville College), Delan Baines (Coffeyville College), Leland Young (Coffeyville College), Bryon Greely (Coffeyville College), Jacobie Fowler (Coffeyville College). Not pictured is Wayalnd Hurst who signed a letter of intent with McNeese

to keep moving,” Strambler said. “I think, in total, I sent State University. 7,000 and something emails. It’s tireless work. It’s really something you have to give your all into. This is truly my passion.”

Then the selling process begins, and make no mistake, to excel as a recruiting coordinator one must be an excellent salesman with an expert knowledge of his product, Strambler said.

Continuing to advocate for his players and network with college programs throughout the year is a full-time job in and of itself. In the thick of the recruiting process, Strambler said he spends about seven to eight hours a day reaching out to colleges.

“If I’m not on my computer, I work from my phone, constantly, tirelessly,” Strambler said. “Time is of the essence when it comes to this. It’s all in.”

Always seeking more outlets to promote his players, Strambler does not stop at the traditional communication methods to sell schools on them. The emergence of social media, he said, has been a game changer.

“Twitter might be one of the greatest things invented,” Strambler said. “You’re able to reach anybody at any time, and they’re open to talk to you about anything. That’s probably one of the biggest avenues I’ve used to get to this point, to get these kids where they need to be.”

As if all of that weren’t enough, Strambler also insists on making face-to-face visits with the college coaching staffs, regardless of where they are located.

“I probably go out of state every other week,” Strambler said. “If I’m not driving, I’ll fly.”

His travels on the recruiting trail have taken Strambler as far as the University of Michigan where he met new Wolverines head coach Jim Harbaugh and of course, added him to his expansive contact list.

“We’re friends on Twitter now. I got his cellphone now. We can talk every single day,” Strambler said. “That’s something not everybody can do. You’ve got to be willing to sacrifice your own time for the kids.”

Hard work paying off

Strambler’s work this year gave Dickinson the fourth-largest signing class in the Houston metropolitan area, with 13 football players receiving scholarships on Wednesday trailing only Fort Bend Hightower (17), Katy (15) and Aldine Davis (14).

Strambler expects about four more players will sign scholarships in the coming days and weeks after National Signing Day.

Players like running back Jordan Myers (Rice), tight end Blake Carlisle (SMU) and offensive lineman Anietie Etuk (Abilene Christian) were fairly easy sells, and many recruiting coordinators would be pleased with that list of signees alone.

But with several deserving athletes still empty-handed, Strambler reached down deep to the junior college ranks, where seven of the 13 Dickinson signees on Wednesday received scholarships, including six from Coffeyville Community College in Coffeyville, Kan.

"There's probably 1,000 people here that don't know where the hell Coffeyville is at," Strambler said. "You have to go find places where your kids fit. If nobody's coming to get them, you have to be able to place them in the best possible situation for them to be successful."

Dickinson's 13th man at the signing table Wednesday got his college offer at just about the 13th hour. Long overlooked by colleges, Strambler failed to give up on running back James Randle, who finally received a scholarship offer from Fort Scott Community College in Fort Scott, Kan., over the weekend.

"I almost dropped the phone. I thought somebody was playing on my phone," Randle said. "I was like, 'Yes sir. I'll go.'"

Randle saw limited time on the field playing behind the Gators' workhorse running back Myers this season, but Strambler was able to put together enough positive game footage to convince Fort Scott coaches to give Randle a chance that it did not look like he would ever get.

"Like my brother always told me, 'Anything beats a blank,'" Randle said.

As a Dickinson native and 2003 graduate of Dickinson High School himself, getting more college-educated Dickinson natives to potentially return to the community and make it a better place is one of the things that fuels Strambler's efforts the most.

"We want to see them be successful, come back and be successful adults, parents, fathers and be able to help the community out," Strambler said. "It's one of the things that when I was here, I wasn't truly allotted, but being from Dickinson, I understand the need."