

French beats snow, signs with Oregon

Written by Jim Ecker

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Christian French got up early Wednesday morning to help his mother and stepfather shovel all the snow in front of their house on the northeast side of Cedar Rapids.

There wasn't any school due to the heavy storm that hit the midwest on Tuesday, but he needed to get to Kennedy and sign his national letter-of-intent with the University of Oregon football program.

That made the shoveling worthwhile.

"We had about two feet with the drifts in front of our house," said French. "And then on the street it was like 7 or 8 inches."

French got in the family's F-150 truck with his mother, Caroline Luter-French, and step-father, Russell Dobbins, for the short drive to Kennedy High School.

"Our street wasn't plowed, so we had to work our way through the snow on our street," he said. "I wouldn't expect a blizzard on signing day, but hey, there's no school and I can't complain."

They were joined at Kennedy by Aaron Stecker, the activities director, so French could sign his letter-of-intent and fax the document to Oregon. Kennedy had planned a ceremony in the main gym for French and other athletes, but the snowstorm delayed those plans for another day.

The Oregon Ducks, however, wanted French's document Wednesday so they could announce their entire recruiting class on the opening day of the signing period.

"We got it all faxed out to Oregon and they said they got it, so it's all good," he said.

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"It's definitely a relief of stress," he said. "I got it sent, so now I'm an Oregon Duck and I don't have to worry about it. I can just focus on the rest of school and get out there and tend to my business."

French will be joining a football program that reached the national championship game this past season and finished No.2 in the national polls after losing to Auburn, 22-19, in the BCS title game. He'll be joining one of the elite programs in the country.

"I think about it all the time, but it won't really set in until you get there," he said. "I don't think it will hit me until I get out there and then I'll really see what goes on and what kind of player and what kind of person I have to be to compete and be successful."

French, 6-6, 225, has been recruited as a tight end, but also could play outside linebacker or defensive end.

French signed his letter-of-intent at approximately 8:30 Wednesday morning, then planned to head home. "I'll eat some breakfast and then get back in bed for a little bit," he said.

French also plays for the fourth-ranked Kennedy basketball team and he figured there would be practice Wednesday afternoon, once everyone had shoveled their share of snow.

Linn-Mar, Washington and Marion also had planned signing ceremonies Wednesday for their athletes, but all the ceremonies were canceled due to the storm.

Linn-Mar seniors Jer Garman, Mac Mahmens and Brandon Allen will be joining college football programs next season. Garman, a record-setting tailback who rushed for 4,474 yards during his prep career, will be attending the University of North Dakota.

Mahmens, a 285-pound lineman, will be joining Minnesota-Duluth, which won the NCAA Division II national title this past season. Allen, a tight end and defensive end, is headed to Iowa

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Western Community College, which finished 9-2 and played in the Top of The Mountain Bowl last season.

Washington senior Alex Carr will be attending the University of Northern Iowa next season. Carr was a star tailback for the Warriors in 2010, but he's also a top defensive back and could be used in a variety of roles with the Panthers.

Washington has rescheduled its signing ceremony for Thursday afternoon and will salute Carr, Brandon Besong (soccer, Missouri State), Morgan Bjornsen (soccer, UNI), Dakota Freese (baseball, LSU-Eunice), Trent Hoekstra (golf, Iowa Wesleyan) and Ashley Piper (basketball, Colorado Christian).

Kennedy planned to recognize five other athletes who will continue their careers in college with Katie Helmlinger (soccer, Drake), Shauna Happel (soccer, UNI), Griffin Michael (baseball, Southeastern Community College), David Yancey (baseball, Southeastern C.C.) and Terrell Sykes (baseball, Southeastern C.C.).

Marion High School had planned a ceremony for Tyler Fisher, who will play football at Upper Iowa University.