

Eight Spartan Footballers Sign Letters of Intent

Signing day is always bittersweet for 16th-year Bixby Spartan head football coach Loren Montgomery. He's proud of the signees while realizing that talented players are leaving the program.

During the February national signing day, eight Bixby football players signed to play on the next level. BHS has a large number of signees each year, but this season might be the largest group. "It was a good crew ... it's bittersweet. I'm happy for them but wondering 'how are we going to replace all these college football players,'" Coach Montgomery said following the February signing ceremony.

"They really did work hard. There were the ones we knew would be elite players and there were some who did it, 100 percent through development ... they committed to the process."

The Spartans' state championship program has prepared several players for the next level during Coach Montgomery's tenure. It's a source of pride for the coaching staff.

"Coach (Mike) Rogers put together the 'Rogers Report' which he sent out to the coaches letting us know where former players would be playing each Saturday," Coach Montgomery said. "We started posting the list for the fans to see. I think there was one Saturday last season we had 28 guys who were playing in games. We take a lot of pride in seeing former players play on Saturdays."

In the early signing period in December, Spartans' Cord Nolan (Texas Tech), Braeden Presley (Oklahoma State) and Emory Snyder (West Virginia) signed letters while teammate Trey McGlothlin announced his decision to ink with West Virginia.

Here's a look at the February signees:

Gabe Blankenship, 5-6, 163-pound Running Back Northeastern State University, Tahlequah

After being part of a winning culture, Bixby's hard-running tailback Gabe Blankenship signed recently to play collegiately for Northeastern State University in Tahlequah.

Northeastern State, under second-year head coach Darren Chiaverini, bounced back from a 2-9 record in 2024 by finishing 9-3 this past season.

"I liked NSU because the coaching staff has built a winning culture," Blankenship said.

"Tahlequah is a fun and familiar place to me. I'll enjoy pursuing my future there."

Blankenship played a pivotal role in Bixby's offensive attack last season, rushing 48 times for 309 yards and six touchdowns. He averaged 6.4 yards per carry. He also caught four passes for 75 yards and three TDs.

He is currently competing in wrestling where he is a starter on Bixby's regional champion wrestling team.

Dylan Jones, 5-11, 170-pound Defensive Back/Wide Receiver Missouri S&T University, Rolla, Missouri

Receiving a quality education attracted Spartan defensive back/wide receiver Dylan Jones to sign a letter-of-intent with Missouri S&T University from Rolla, Missouri.

Missouri S&T's football team recorded a 6-5 record last season, the fourth season under head coach Andy Ball. Jones said the Miners are looking at him playing safety.

"Mostly what attracted me were the coaches. And I'm going into engineering and they have one of the top engineering programs in the world," Jones said. "When I went there it felt like home, it was like a big family."

Defensively, Jones was credited with 18 total tackles, including 12 unassisted stops during the Spartans' state championship season.

**Carson Kirby, 5-11, 200-pound Quarterback
Northeastern State University, Tahlequah**

After a record-setting three-year career as the Spartan quarterback Carson Kirby remembered his first collegiate offer when deciding to sign with Northeastern State.

"They were my first offer, offering me after my junior year," Kirby said recently. "They are trying to build the program and are doing a great job so far with the season they had last year. The new coaching staff and the group they have are unbelievable, and they develop players at a super-fast rate.

"When I was on campus, it was a no-brainer. It will be super fun going in there to compete with a new team and a new coach."

Kirby, who plans to run track again this season, feels he's prepared for the next step after steadily progressing through Bixby's program the past three seasons.

"From my sophomore year to now has been amazing the way coach (Tyler) Schneider developed us. And I couldn't be more grateful to coach Monty (Montgomery) for believing in me during my sophomore year. This place is run like a college program ... we've been known on a national scale for the way we develop players."

In leading BHS to the 2025 Class 6A state championship, Kirby completed 70 percent of his pass attempts for 2,939 yards and 39 touchdowns. He contributed 297 yards rushing with five TDs.

**Jayson Moll, 5-6, 165-pound Running Back
Alabama-Birmingham University, Birmingham, Alabama**

Talented running back Jayson Moll moved to Bixby for his senior season and enjoyed a productive season along with earning a state championship ring.

Moll had several offers before deciding late to sign with the University of Alabama-Birmingham, a football program which ended last season with a 4-8 record under fourth-year head coach Andy Ball.

"I know there I might have a chance to make an impact early which was the most important thing," Moll said of the reason he signed with UAB. "It was relatively late ... I started talking with them about a month ago. I had been developing a relationship, but when I took my official visit, I really enjoyed it. I'm very excited about this opportunity."

Moll led the Spartans in rushing with 1,506 yards on 156 carries, an average of 9.7 yards per carry. He ran for 17 touchdowns. He also caught 19 passes for 226 yards and three TDs.

**Joe Peters, 6-2, 248-pound Defensive Lineman
Missouri Western University, St. Joseph, Missouri**

Everything about Missouri Western felt like a good fit for Bixby's defensive lineman Joe Peters, who recently signed with the Griffons.

"I liked the coaching staff. I liked everything they have going for them. I like their future as well as the overall feel of the campus ... it felt like home to me," Peters said of Missouri Western.

"They were after me before everyone started jumping in. I'm ready to take my game to the next level."

Peters said Missouri Western's coaches have him projected to play in the defensive line. As a senior at BHS, Peters ended with 31 total tackles, 14 tackles for loss, four sacks and one fumble caused.

**Bradley Thao, 5-10, 211-pound Kicker
University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond**

Playing football wasn't in Thao's future a few years ago when he spent his extra-curricular time playing soccer. But, once he joined the football team, his strong leg became a special team weapon, and he steadily worked himself into position to play football on the collegiate level. "It was not on my radar a couple of years ago. I was first involved in soccer, but when I came to football, I was able to get a college scholarship. I feel like I have the potential to be one of the greats," Thao said.

"The first practice (at Bixby) I was really bad, but I stuck with it and went out every day to work to get better and now I'm signing. I like the coaches at UCO. They've got a winning program like Bixby, so it just felt right.

"I went to a lot of camps last summer trying to get a DI offer ... I did good at the camps and started getting offers."

Thao's senior season included kicking 67 of 99 kickoffs into the end zone, converting 68-of-70 extra-point kicks and connecting on five-of-six field goal attempts.

**Cooper Upton, 6-5, 309-pound Offensive Lineman
University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond**

After moving from Florida, Bixby's Cooper Upton was roaming the halls as an eighth grader when he was steered toward the Spartan football program by BHS assistant William Maas.

"I didn't play any sports my eighth-grade year and then coach Maas actually saw me walk in my first day of school and he said you're playing football. I had been mainly only playing baseball." Through hard work and commitment, Upton developed into a solid contributor on Bixby's talented offensive line this season, earning an opportunity to play college football at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond.

"I just loved the proximity of the campus to my home and I liked the school. The facilities are awesome, it just feels like home," Upton said. "UCO was the first camp I went to last summer and I really liked it. After going to other schools at the last minute, that's when I knew it was UCO.

"Right now, they said they'd look at me as a tackle, but I might play a little guard, too. When I went for my official visit last October, I spent a lot of time with both Puckett brothers (former Spartans Jack and Hank) and they helped me out."

UCO went 6-5 last season while the Bronchos posted an 11-2 record in 2024 under fifth-year head coach Adam Dorrell (123-58 career record).

**Tyler Wright 6-2, 176-pound Defensive Back/Wide Receiver
University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky**

After an outstanding senior season on both sides of the ball, Bixby's Tyler Wright received small college recruiting interest before Kentucky entered the picture in December. It was an opportunity he couldn't ignore as he recently signed with the Wildcats.

"Kentucky entered the picture in December. I had other offers but the coach at Kentucky (defensive coordinator Jay Bateman) was at (Texas) A&M and he was the first one to recruit me. He said he'd take me with him wherever he went," Wright said.

"It happened really quick ... I'm blessed. I went and visited and it felt like home. It's like family up there ... I love the countryside and I liked the environment. They are looking at me at defensive back."

Kentucky, a member of the Southeastern Conference, will be led by first-year head coach Will Stein this season. The Wildcats were 5-7 in 2025, the last season under head coach Mark Stoops. Wright, also the leading scorer on Bixby's basketball team, posted outstanding numbers in his final season with the Spartans.

Defensively, Wright was credited with 59 tackles, including 40 solo stops. He had three tackles for loss and led the Spartans with eight pass interceptions for 137 yards. He returned three pass thefts for touchdowns.

Offensively, he caught 18 passes for 258 yards and two touchdowns while rushing three times for 10 yards and one TD.