

**For Immediate  
Release**



**Redbird Football**  
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## ***Illinois State Football Inks 16 on National Signing Day***

**NORMAL, Ill.** – Illinois State head football coach **Brock Spack** announced the newest additions to the Redbird football team Wednesday, as he formally unveiled his first recruiting class at ISU, which included 16 signees on National Signing Day at a public event at the Kaufman Football Building.

Of Illinois State's 16 signees, 10 are slated to play offensive positions. Spack also addressed the team's transition to a spread offense with the signing of four wide receivers, and a quarterback – **Matt Lancaster** (West Lafayette, Ind./West Lafayette HS) – that have previous experience playing in a spread offense.

"Coming in with a new staff and a new coaching philosophy, we felt that we needed to go out and get student-athletes that could run and catch the ball," said Spack. "Signing those types of student-athletes was critical to our program. When you throw the ball a lot, you need enough receivers who can take the reps that we plan to give them throughout the course of the season."

Spack and his staff also sought highly-skilled players from the football-rich state of Illinois, with the signing of eight student-athletes from Illinois, which marked the most recruits from any state. Included in that group is Bloomington-Normal product **Zach Liming** (Normal, Ill./Normal Community HS).

"The state of Illinois has some tremendous football talent, and it was really a joy for me and my staff to recruit some of the best players within the state to come play for Illinois State," said Spack. "We wanted to have the heart and soul of our team and of this year's recruiting class come from the state of Illinois, and I think we were able to accomplish that. We signed some great offensive and defensive linemen out of Illinois, something that this state's high school football teams are known for producing."

Despite having just a little over a month to put together Illinois State's 2009 recruiting class following the Dec. 17, 2008, announcement of his hiring as ISU's 20<sup>th</sup> head football coach, Spack believes that his staff was very successful in recruiting top-level talent for the Redbird football program.

"This year's recruiting class is exciting for us, as it is a tremendously talented group of student-athletes, but at the same time, we feel like we just scratched the surface of what we can bring to the program," said Spack. "We're looking forward to having an entire year to recruit."

"We felt that we got play some definite playmakers with this year's recruiting class, both on offense and on defense. When you run a spread offense, such as we will run at Illinois State, your entire team mentality starts with the quarterback. We believe that we have an excellent quarterback recruit in Matt Lancaster. From there, we felt we needed to add depth to our receiving corps, and I think we did that with the signing of the wide receivers that we will have for next year."

... biographies and signing day notes to follow ...

**2009 ILLINOIS STATE FOOTBALL SIGNEES**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Pos</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Hometown (Last School)</u>
Abdul Ayanwale	SS	6-3	190	Deltona, Fla. (DeLand)
John Brewer	DL	6-3	230	Lake Zurich, Ill. (Lake Zurich)
Cardale Brown	RB	5-10	196	St. Augustine, Fla. (St. Augustine)
Ben Ericksen	WR	6-1	170	Greendale, Wis. (Greendale)
Ryan Givens	RB	5-9	176	Milwaukee (Riverside University High)
Rodney Johnson	LB/DE	6-0	210	Chicago (Morgan Park)
Matt Lancaster	QB	6-2	190	West Lafayette, Ind. (West Lafayette)
Zach Liming	OL/DL	6-4	270	Normal, Ill. (Normal Community)
Jason Link	DL	6-3	235	Galesburg, Ill. (Cactus Shadows [Ariz.])
Jordan Neukirch	RB/LB	6-2	220	Algonquin, Ill. (Huntley)
Tyler Van Sligtenhorst	ATH	5-7	174	Payallup, Wash. (Rogers)
Hendry Vande Hey	OT	6-5	283	DePere, Wis. (Wrightstown)
Brandon Venson	WR	6-3	225	Glendale Heights, Ill. (Coll. of DuPage)
Tyrone Walker	WR	5-11	175	Indianapolis (Cardinal Ritter)
Brandon Westphal	FS	6-1	200	Bolingbrook, Ill. (Bolingbrook)
Michael Zimmer	LB	6-3	210	Wheeling, Ill. (Wheeling)

## SIGNING DAY NOTES

- The breakdown of Illinois State's 2009 signees, by position: wide receiver (3), running back (3), offensive line (2), defensive line (2), safety (2) and linebacker (2), athlete (1) and quarterback (1).
- The state with the most players represented is Illinois, which has eight signees. Wisconsin is second with three signees, followed by Florida (2), Indiana (2) and Washington (1).
- Illinois State's signing of four wide receivers means that it will start the 2009 season with nine receivers on roster, as the Redbirds return five wide receivers from last season. Included in that group of returning receivers is 2008 All-Valley Football Conference First-Team honoree **Eyad Salem**, who will be a senior on the 2009 squad.
- Illinois State continued to recruit and sign student-athletes from talent-rich Normal Community High School. NCHS product **Zach Liming** will join **Mike Cross**, **Austin Davis**, **Billy Dickson**, **Jake Detmers** and **Marcus King** as Normal Community graduates currently on the Redbird football roster. Normal Community High School won both the 2005 and 2006 Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Class 6A State Championship while that quintet was on the NCHS roster.

## SIGNING DAY BIOGRAPHIES:

### **Abdulle Ayanwale | SS | 6-3 | 190 | Deltona, Fla. | DeLand HS**

**DeLand HS:** A two-sport athlete who competed in both football and basketball ... 2008 Daytona Beach *News-Journal* All-Area Defensive Honorable Mention selection.

**Data:** Born Aug. 22, 1990, in Brooklyn, N.Y. ... son of Ganiyu Ayanwale and Daphrire Worthover ... one of three children ... intended major is forensics.

### **John Brewer | DL | 6-3 | 230 | Lake Zurich, Ill. | Lake Zurich HS**

**Lake Zurich HS:** A four-year letterwinner in football and a two-year letterwinner in wrestling ... an all-state selection as a senior and a honorable mention all-state honoree as a junior ... also earned all-conference and all-area honors as a junior ... named the Lake Zurich High School Defensive Lineman of the Year as a junior ... Lake Zurich won the IHSA Class 7A State Championship his junior season ... was the freshman/sophomore IHSA State Champion in wrestling as a sophomore ... coached by Bryan Stortz.

**Data:** Born Oct. 1, 1990, in Chicago ... son of Charles and Robin Brewer ... one of two children ... intended major is criminal justice.

### **Cardale Brown | RB | 5-10 | 196 | St. Augustine, Fla. | St. Augustine HS**

**St. Augustine HS:** A two-year starter and a four-year letterwinner in football ... earned all-county accolades during junior and senior year ... had 91 carries for 930 yards rushing and 12 touchdowns as a junior and 65 carries for 811 yards rushing and eight touchdowns as a senior ... St. Augustine High School won the Florida Class 3A State Championship his freshman season (2005) and finished as the state runner-up in 2007 with a 13-2 record ... St. Augustine went to the Florida Class 3A Playoffs in 2008 with a 12-1 record ... also recruited by Arkansas and Purdue ... coached by Joey Wiles.

**Data:** Born Feb. 1, 1990, in Salt Lake City ... son of Carlton and Brenda Brown ... one of four children ... his father, Carlton, coaches football at St. Augustine High School ... intended major is technology.

### **Ben Ericksen | WR | 6-1 | 170 | Greendale, Wis. | Greendale HS**

**Greendale HS:** Rated as a one-star recruit by Scout.com ... the 2008 Gatorade Wisconsin Football Player of the Year ... was also a candidate for the 2008 Gatorade National Football Player of the Year award ... led the state of Wisconsin in 2008 in receiving yards (1,335 yards) and receiving touchdowns (19) ... averaged 111.2 rushing yards per game and 19.3 yards per carry ... owns the Greendale High School career records for receptions, receiving yards and receiving touchdowns ... led Greendale High School to three-straight Wisconsin Division 3 State Playoff appearances, including a state runner-up performance in 2006 ... conference player of the year, conference RB offensive player of the year and first-team all-conference as a senior ... unanimous all-state selection senior year, as well as being named to the all-area and all-region teams ... honorable mention all-state selection junior year ... also recruited by Wisconsin, North Dakota State and South Dakota State ... coached by Rob Stoltz.

**Data:** Born Sept. 2, 1990, in Milwaukee ... son of Lee Ericksen ... one of three children ... undecided on intended major.

### **Ryan Givens | RB | 5-9 | 176 | Milwaukee | Riverside University HS**

**Riverside University HS:** Rated as a two-star recruit by Rivals.com ... a four-year letterwinner in football and track and field ... an *Associated Press* High School All-American at running back in 2008 ... a two-time first-team all-conference selection ... recorded 1,640 rushing yards as a senior with 26 touchdowns ... also had 300 receiving yards senior year and two kick returns for a touchdown ... Riverside High School went 8-2 in 2008 en route to a conference championship and a playoff appearance ... coached by Patrick Wagner ... also recruited by Southern Illinois, North Dakota State, Buffalo, North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota.

**Data:** Born Sept. 1, 1991, in Fort Hood, Texas ... son of Derryl Sr. and Gwendolyn Givens ... one of four children ... intended major is exercise science.

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**Rodney Johnson | LB/DE | 6-0 | 210 | Chicago | Morgan Park HS**

**Morgan Park HS:** Competed in both football and track and field ... team captain senior year ... earned the Morgan Park High School special teams player award as a junior, as well as the team's hit-man award as a sophomore ... Morgan Park played in both the 2006 and 2007 IHSA State Quarterfinals ... Morgan Park won the Chicago Public League City Championship and the Chicago Public League conference championship in 2007 ... coached by Lexie Spurlock.

**Data:** Born Nov. 15, 1990, in Chicago ... son of Rodney Johnson Sr. and Sandra Patterson ... one of four children ... intended major is engineering or accounting.

**Matt Lancaster | QB | 6-2 | 190 | West Lafayette, Ind. | West Lafayette HS**

**West Lafayette HS:** Rated as a two-star recruit by Rivals.com and as a one-star recruit by Scout.com ... a three-sport athlete that competed in football, basketball and baseball ... named to the Indiana Football Coaches Association (IFCA) Class 3A All-State First Team as a senior ... a two-time *Lafayette Journal & Courier* All-Area First-Team and Big School Offensive Player of the Year selection ... team MVC and team captain as a senior ... a three-time All-Hoosier Conference honoree ... earned *Bloomington Herald* Special Mention accolades as a junior ... an Indiana High School Athletic Association (IHSAA) Class 3A Academic All-State honoree as a senior ... a 2008 IHSAA Anti-Tobacco Role Model ... West Lafayette High School won the Hoosier Conference championship his senior season while being ranked No. 1 at the Class 3A level in the state of Indiana ... owns career records at West Lafayette High School for passing yards (5,411), pass attempts (653), pass completions (368) and touchdown passes (58) ... owns single-season records at West Lafayette High School for passing yards (2,349 – 2008), pass completions (163 – 2008) and touchdown passes (30 – 2008) ... also recruited by Purdue, Indiana, Ball State and Toledo ... coached by Marshall Overley.

**Data:** Born Oct. 5, 1990, in Lafayette, Ind. ... son of Brian and Carol Lancaster ... undecided on intended major.

**Zach Liming | OL/DL | 6-4 | 270 | Normal, Ill. | Normal Community HS**

**Normal Community HS:** A two-year starter in football ... earned all-state and special mention all-state honors senior year as an offensive and defensive lineman, respectively ... a Big 12 Conference First-Team All-Star at both offense and defense in 2008 ... also earned *Pantagraph* All-Area honors senior year as a defensive lineman ... member of the 2006 Normal Community High School team that won the IHSA Class 6A State Championship ... Normal Community was a combined 21-3 during his junior and senior seasons and won two-straight conference championships during that time ... Normal Community also played in the IHSA State Semifinals his junior year ... teammate of current Redbirds **Billy Dickson, Michael Cross, Marcus King, Austin Davis and Jake Detmers** ... coached by Hud Venerable and Wes Temples.

**Data:** Born Sept. 24, 1990, in Normal, Ill. ... son of Steve and Susan Liming ... one of five children ... his mother and father both graduated from Illinois State, while his brother, Josh, currently attends Illinois State.

**Jason Link | DL | 6-3 | 235 | Galesburg, Ill. | Cactus Shadows HS (Ariz.)**

**Cave Creek HS:** Competed in both football and track and field at Galesburg High School and Cactus Shadows High School (Ariz.) ... started for the Cactus Shadows High School team that won the Arizona Class 4A Division II State Championship ... a two-time winner of the Cactus Shadows High School defensive line award ... team captain senior year ... recorded 62 tackles and eight sacks as a senior ... had 59 tackles as a junior, along with six sacks ... coached by Chad DeGrenier, who was named the 2006 MaxPreps High School Coach of the Year.

**Data:** Born Oct. 29, 1990, in Ames, Iowa ... son of Greg and Miriam Link ... one of four children ... his mother, Miriam, ran cross country and track and field at Truman State ... his grandfather, Bob Boatright, played football at Missouri Valley College ... intended major is agricultural business or horticulture.

**Jordan Neukirch | RB/LB | 6-2 | 220 | Algonquin, Ill. | Huntley HS**

**Huntley HS:** A three-year starter in football and a four-year starter in basketball ... *Northwest Herald* and *Daily Herald* Player of the Year as a senior ... a two-time *Northwest Herald* and *Daily Herald* All-Area First-Team selection ... named to the Illinois High School Football Coaches Association All-State Team senior year ... all-conference, team captain as a junior and senior ... team defensive MVP as a junior ... rushed for 1,730 yards as a senior with 25 touchdowns, 20 receptions, 90 tackles and two interceptions ... Algonquin High School won the Fox Valley Conference regular-season championship his senior year ... Algonquin set the IHSA State Playoffs record for most team rushing yards in a game in 2008 with 712 yards rushing during a first-round playoff game against Batavia High School ... also earned all-area and all-conference honors in basketball as a junior ... also recruited by Northwestern, Purdue, Wisconsin, Ball State, Northern Illinois and Eastern Illinois.

**Data:** Born April 27, 1991, in Chicago ... son of Adam and Corinne Neukirch ... one of two children ... intended major is business administration.

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**Tyler Van Sligtenhorst | ATH | 5-7 | 174 | Payallup, Wash. | Rogers HS**

**Rogers HS:** Rated as the No. 38 preseason prospect in the state of Washington by WashingtonPreps.com ... threw for 1,736 yards and 20 touchdowns as a senior ... rushed for 1,009 yards and 16 touchdowns in 2008 and collected five interceptions from the safety position, returning one for a touchdown ... *Tacoma News-Tribune* First-Team All-State as a senior ... led the conference in punt return average in 2008 with 24.3 yards per return ... earned first-team South Puget Sound League (SPSL) honors at quarterback and defensive back as a senior ... named the SPSL South's Defensive Back of the Year and earned *Tacoma News-Tribune* All-Area Player of the Year honors in 2008 ... was a second-team all-conference selection at quarterback as a junior, while also earning the SPSL's Defensive Back of the Year award ... also recruited by Oregon, Washington State, Boise State, Eastern Washington, Central Washington, Western Washington ... coached by Gene Bowen.

**Henry Vande Hey | OT | 6-5 | 283 | DePere, Wis. | Wrightstown HS**

**Wrightstown HS:** Rated as a two-star recruit by Scout.com ... ranked as the 130<sup>th</sup>-best defensive tackle in the nation by Scout.com ... ranked as the 43<sup>rd</sup>-best prospect in the state of Wisconsin by WisconsinPreps.com ... all-conference selection senior year as both an offensive lineman and defensive lineman ... team MVP and team captain senior year ... Wrightstown High School co-defensive player of the year junior year ... second-team all-conference offensive lineman and defensive lineman as a junior ... member of the 2006 Wrightstown High School team that won the Wisconsin Division II State Championship ... also recruited by Wisconsin ... coached by Steve Klister.

**Data:** Born Sept. 14, 1990, in Green Bay, Wis. ... son of Virgil and Sandra Vande Hey ... one of eight children ... undecided on intended major.

**Brandon Venson | WR | 6-3 | 225 | Glendale Heights, Ill. | Glenbard West HS/Northern Illinois/College of DuPage**

**College of DuPage:** Played one season and had 60 catches for 618 yards and seven touchdowns ... a second-team all-region selection ... named team MVP, most valuable offensive player and most skilled player in 2008 ... was the offensive team captain ... coached by Fred Timbles.

**Northern Illinois:** Was a recruited walk-on as a freshman ... redshirted during the 2007 season ... coached by Jon Novak ... transferred to College of DuPage for the spring 2008 semester.

**Glenbard West HS:** Rated as a two-star recruit by Scout.com ... a two-time all-area and all-conference selection ... an all-junior state team honoree as a junior ... named team captain senior year ... also played basketball ... his high school basketball team went 22-8 senior year and played in the Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Super-Sectional game ... Glenbard West High School was a regional and sectional champion his senior year ... teammate of current Illinois State football player **Kane Keirnan** ... coached by John Karpowicz.

**Data:** Born Feb. 17, 1988, in Oak Park, Ill. ... son of Elmer Venson and Jammie Byrd ... one of three children ... his uncle, Keith Venson, played football at Alabama State ... intended major is physical therapy.

**Tyrone Walker | WR | 5-11 | 175 | Indianapolis | Cardinal Ritter HS**

**Cardinal Ritter HS:** A two-year starter in football ... an all-state selection as a senior and a junior all-state selection as a junior ... a two-time all-city honoree ... voted the team's MVP senior year ... member of the Coaches' Poll Top-50 players list ... Cardinal Ritter High School won the Indiana Class 1A State Championship his senior season after finishing with a perfect 15-0 record and the No. 1 ranking in the state ... Cardinal Ritter also won the semi-state championship his junior season ... recorded an Indiana state high school record 1,893 yards receiving as a senior on 96 receptions and 23 touchdowns ... also had six interceptions on defense and two forced fumbles senior year ... a four-time student of the month and student-athlete of the month honoree ... coached by Ty Hunt.

**Data:** Born Aug. 25, 1990, in Indianapolis ... raised by his aunt, Marquerite Watkins ... intended major is accounting or education.

**Brandon Westphal | FS | 6-1 | 200 | Bolingbrook, Ill. | Bolingbrook HS**

**Bolingbrook HS:** A two-sport athlete who competed in both football and track and field ... an all-state special mention selection as a senior ... earned Southwest Suburban Conference All-Conference honors senior year ... recorded 65 total tackles a senior, along with two interceptions, two forced fumbles, two fumble recoveries and one quarterback sack ... member of two-straight Southwest Suburban Conference regular-season championship teams ... placed fifth in the indoor 4x400-meters at the IHSA State Track and Field Championships as a junior ... conference champion in the 400-meter dash as a sophomore and set a school record for the 4x200-meter run ... coached in football by John Ivlow.

**Data:** Born Nov. 20, 1990, in Bolingbrook, Ill. ... the son of Brian Westphal and Gayle Fountain ... one of three children ... his grandfather, Charles Westphal, played football at Montana State-Billings ... intended major is business administration.

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**Michael Zimmer | LB | 6-3 | 210 | Wheeling, Ill. | Wheeling HS**

**Wheeling HS:** A three-sport athlete that competed in football, basketball and track and field ... a 2008 All-Mid-Suburban Conference selection ... named to the Chicago Sun-Times Chicago 100 Team as a senior ... earned Rivals.com All-State honors as a senior, as well as *Chicago Tribune* All-State Honorable mention accolades ... selected to the *Daily Herald* All-Area Team in 2008 ... named the Wheeling High School team captain and team MVP senior year ... was a member of Wheeling High School's two-straight IHSA State Playoff teams, the first Wheeling football squad in school history to make the state playoffs in consecutive years ... recorded 70 tackles as a senior, along with seven defensive touchdowns ... also recruited by Illinois, Iowa, Michigan State, Northwestern, Northern Illinois, Western Michigan and South Dakota ... coached by Dave Dunbar.

**Data:** Born Sept. 23, 1990, in Prospect Heights, Ill. ... son of Brian and Cindy Zimmer ... one of four children ... intended major is history.

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