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(Neb.)-Nine join CSC football program at semester

By: Andrew Lacy Posted at: 01/23/2013 10:12 AM

CHADRON – Nine athletes have joined the Chadron State College football program at the start of the second semester and will participate in spring practice beginning in March, head coach Jay Long said.

Five of the newcomers were recruited to help replace four seniors who were among the five players who saw most of the action in the defensive line last fall, when the Eagles went 9-3 and were ranked No. 18 in the final American Football Coaches Association Division II poll.

"We graduated some great players in our defensive front and knew we needed some help there," Long said. "That is our greatest need as we look forward to the 2013 season. We found some players that we think can help us right away."

Long said the Eagles also have gained a couple of promising linebackers and are glad to have two western Nebraska natives join the team.

The latter two are Jonathan Houser, a speedster from Hay Springs, and Zach Smith, an all-around athlete from Gering. Houser is expected to be a running back or wide receiver and Smith will be a candidate for playing time in the defensive secondary.

Houser rushed 189 times for 1,297 yards and scored 21 touchdowns while playing at Creek Valley High School at Chappell as a junior in 2009. He played at Hay Springs his senior year, when he carried 65 times for 698 yards, an average of 10.7 yards, and participated in 70 tackles.

Houser also placed in the 100 meters at the State Track Meet and was a member of the district meet's winning 400 and 1600-meter relay teams when he was a senior at Hay Springs in 2011.

Smith starred in football and basketball at Gering High School and also was an outstanding American Legion baseball player. As a senior in the fall of 2011, he caught 29 passes for 380 yards, participated in 45 tackles and led the Panhandle's 11-man players with five interceptions.

He was enrolled at Western Nebraska Community College at Scottsbluff last fall.

Four of the defensive line recruits are from California community colleges.

They are Sean Acuna and Roy Duenas-Sanchez, both of whom played at East Los Angeles College the past two years; Brandon Blinn from Palomar Community College and Jon Barkley from Santa Monica College. All will be juniors this fall.

Acuna and Duenas-Sanchez helped East Los Angeles have back-to-back winning seasons. Acuna is 6-foot, 285 pounds and a native of Hacienda Heights, Calif., while Duenas-Sanchez is 6-1, 330 and is a Los Angeles native.

Blinn is 6-3, 245, is originally from Everett, Wash., and played in that state's high school all-star game.

Barkley, who is 6-3, 265, was an all-conference selection at Santa Monica College when it won the conference championship in 2011.

The other defensive line candidate is Jake Weber, a 6-2, 255-pound graduate of Rapid City Central High School, where he was a three-time all-conference choice and earned all-state honors as a senior in 2011. He redshirted at Augustana University in Sioux Falls last fall and has four years of eligibility remaining.

One of the new linebackers, Benj Vigil of Akron, Colo., was a highly-regarded prospect on the Chadron State teams in 2009 and 2010, but left school before he got much playing time. He was selected by the Rocky Mountain News as Colorado's Class A Player of the Year after helping Akron to a 13-0 season his senior year in 2008.

The other linebacker is Hank Strauss, a native of Aztec, N.M., who earned all-conference honors at Cabrillo College at Aptos, Calif., last fall