

the game

Special Recruiting Edition

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Elite 11 Quarterback Andrew Maxwell excited for Big Ten ball.

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Edwin Baker isn't the only uber-talented tailback headed to MSU. Meet Larry Caper.

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Donald Spencer looks to continue the Spartans' tradition of excellence at wide receiver.

RECRUITING

Fiery linebacker Norman ready for new challenges

"I love hitting hard, playing fast and with a lot of tenacity, just being the best overall team player I can."

Chris Norman, outside linebacker

By Sean Ely
THE STATE NEWS

Like a pendulum, he swings from side to side in one swift motion without skipping a beat.

But in the case of Chris Norman — a verbal commitment for the 2009 MSU football recruiting class — it's sideline to sideline, blasting any ball carrier or blocker that even tries getting in his way.

"I love hitting hard, playing fast and with a lot of tenacity, just being the best overall team player I can, being able to lead the guys and make sure the job gets done," Norman said. "Football has always been my passion."

And according to Norman's varsity head coach, Antonio Watts, he is just as proud of his graduating senior as he is upset that he has to let him go.

"He's everything you could ever want in an athlete on your football team — everything," Watts said. "The kid is agile, he's fast. I love the kid (like my own). He's a versatile style player."

Norman, a 6-foot-2, 207-pound outside linebacker from Detroit Renaissance High, benches up to 325 pounds, squats 450 pounds, runs the 40-yard dash in 4.6 seconds and has a vertical of 40 inches.

Those qualities helped make him the fifth-best high school outside linebacker in the nation, according to Rivals.com.

Norman's versatility has made him a factor at multiple positions, including offense, where he's provided some punch at running back.

The Phoenix finished 5-4 on the year, winning its last two games. However, it came one game short of qualifying for the playoffs.

Norman recently described a "perfect senior year" as one that included at least a city championship.

That didn't happen.

But Norman isn't as crushed as he imagined he would be, as he's still got more than six months to live high school to its fullest.

When it's all said and done, Norman won't be leaving the city of Detroit empty handed, or more appropriately, without a close companion.

Defensive back Dana Dixon, another 2009 verbal commitment, also will make the trip to MSU's dorms this summer.

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"Some people say I'm crazy when I say he's a Bo Jackson type of runner. Once he hits the edge, he's gone. You're not going to get him."

Howard Kent, Oak Park football assistant coach



MEET THE FUTURE



PHOTOS BY HANNAH ENGELSON/THE STATE NEWS

(TOP) Oak Park High running back Edwin Baker gets pumped up for the Knights' game against the Lake Orion Dragons on Sept. 12 in Oak Park. Baker has verbally committed to the MSU football program as a member of the MSU class of 2009. (BOTTOM) Oak Park Knights running back Edwin Baker watches his team from the sidelines of Knight Valley Stadium as they play against the Lake Orion Dragons Sept. 12 in Oak Park.

With blazing speed, impossible strength and an unyielding will to win, Edwin Baker's coaches say believe the hype

By Jacob Carpenter
THE STATE NEWS

As a high school football prospect known for running, Edwin Baker can be defined by his walk. With his broad shoulders square, strong legs beneath him and chiseled upper body, Baker, a star high school senior running back, has no wasted movement in his gait. While Baker's teammates at Oak Park High josh each other with friendly pushes and perpetual put downs, Baker is the odd man out at a high school where he is The Man.

Although high school teammates wander hallways or play cards before a game, Baker spends time with coaches and deals out uniforms from a gray shopping cart like

an equipment manager.

The mild-mannered 5-foot-10 rusher from metro Detroit will arrive at MSU this summer as the jewel of an impressive 2009 recruiting class. He and fellow four-star running back Larry Caper, a senior at Battle Creek Central High, will be the most hyped tailbacks to sign with MSU since Kalamazoo native T.J. Duckett 10 years ago.

Baker, known to friends and teammates as "Rock," burst onto the high school football scene last season by averaging more than 200 yards per game in six games

before suffering an injury.

"My game is pretty simple," Baker said. "I'm fast, explosive, quick, have agility — everything a running back needs to have to play this game."

The compact running back with feet lighter than a feather soon garnered national attention from a who's who of schools, including Southern California, Georgia, Florida, Texas and Tennessee, Baker's favorite team growing up.

Yet, Baker needed only

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RECRUITING

Barrent excited to wear green

"I just kept thinking about Michigan State and I just remembered coming home from my visits and liking it a lot. I just had a change of heart and I decided that was a better direction for me to go."

David Barrent, offensive tackle

By Cash Kruth
THE STATE NEWS

A self-proclaimed "gargantuan high schooler" on his Facebook profile, David Barrent will soon be a gargantuan college student when he comes to East Lansing in the summer of 2009.

Barrent, a 6-foot-8, 290-pound offensive tackle from West Des Moines Valley High in Iowa, is one of 16 verbal commitments for MSU's 2009 recruiting class.

According to recruiting Web site Rivals.com, Barrent is a four-star recruit, but the accolades don't end there. Rivals.com also ranks Barrent as the No. 1 overall prospect in Iowa, the No. 2 best pass blocker in the nation and the No. 9 offensive tackle in the country.

The State News spoke with Barrent earlier this week about his high school success (which hasn't ended yet), MSU football and what happened between May and July that led him to switch his verbal commitment from Iowa to MSU.

The State News

How is your high school team doing this year?

David Barrent (Today) we play in the state semifinal game. It's been really exciting. We're 12-0 and we've just been having a lot of fun. We've been successful throughout our high school careers. Last year we went 11-1, so hopefully we make it to the state championship game this year. It's just been a really fun time for me.

SN According to Rivals.com, you're ranked the top overall prospect in Iowa and the second best pass blocker in the nation. What can you tell us about your game?

DB As far as my game goes, I think it has a lot to do with technique — I've been coached technique by great coaches in my high school career and technique is something they stress. I know if it's off then I won't play as well. That, and also the weight training I've done in the summer and the speed training as well.

SN Last month, you were selected to play in the U.S. Army All-American Bowl Game in San Anto-

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To watch a video interview with Baker, visit statenews.com/multimedia