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TOLEDO ANNOUNCES 29 NEWCOMERS FOR 2023 ON NATIONAL SIGNING DAY

2/1/2023 | Football



TOLEDO, Ohio - Toledo head football coach [Jason Candle](#) announced the addition of 29 players to the Rockets' 2023 squad on National Signing Day on Wednesday.

Toledo added 13 players to its 2023 recruiting class on Wednesday in addition to the 16 players who previously signed in December during the Early Signing Period. Tight end CC Ezirim, outside linebacker Donivon Thomas, wide receiver Jediyah Willoughby signed national letters of intent to play football at Toledo, while offensive linemen Rod Orr (Florida State) and David Nwaogwugwu (Rutgers) join the program as transfers. Eight walk-ons were also announced as future Rockets.

"This is a great class of individuals that are first and foremost first-class people," Candle said. "We signed young men who will value a free education and take that seriously. We signed a few guys who were 4.0 students in high school and a couple who are pre-med. I also think this ia a class of guys who really love football.

"A lot of credit goes out to a lot of different folks who put a lot of time and energy into putting together a great class. The landscape of college football has changed drastically in the last couple of years, but I think we've done a really good job of staying at the core of what we want to do, which is to build our program from the high school level and then add transfers at positions that we feel we have the need. The credit goes to our staff. I think [Ricky Ciccone](#), our recruiting coordinator, is one of the best in the country in evaluating and getting guys on the radar of our coaches. Then our coaches do a really good job of going out and signing players."

The 2023 recruiting class includes players from 11 different states, with 14 coming from the state of Ohio and four of those coming from Northwest Ohio.

"Our recruiting starts with a local footprint right here in our hometown," said Candle. "We have many players from the local area, whether they be scholarship players or guys who have committed here to be preferred walk-ons. We've seen a major influx of talent from our area on our team. It starts from there and branches out. The state of Ohio has been good to us, the state of Michigan has been good to us. Indiana and western PA have always been good to us. That's our home base. After that, if we need to fly on a plane to find guys, we will."

Below is a look at 21 signees in Toledo's 2023 recruiting class.

Julian Allen

Wide Receiver | 6-1 | 198 | Fr. | Clearwater, Fla.-Clearwater Central Catholic

A three-star prospect according to 247 Sports, Julian Allen transferred to Clearwater Central Catholic for his senior season and helped lead the team to the Florida Class 1M state championship game. In 11 games this season he caught 25 passes for 453 yards and six touchdowns.

Braden Awls

Defensive Back | 6-0 | 175 | Fr. | Sylvania, Ohio-Toledo Central Catholic

Braden Awls is a three-star prospect according to 247 Sports. During his senior season he was named first team all-conference as well as first team all-district. In his junior season, he was named first team all-conference and second team all-district. He was twice named first team All-Blade. Awls helped lead Central Catholic to a state championship this past fall.

Micah Cherry

Cornerback | 6-3 | 175 | Jr. | Petal, Miss.-Petal/Pearl River CC

A transfer from Pearl River Community College, Micah Cherry was named honorable mention All-MACCC. In his high school career, Cherry had 1,259 receiving yards, 10 receiving touchdowns, 66 tackles, eight interceptions, one pick six, nine PBUs and three forced fumbles. In high school he was also named first team all-region as well as first team Pine Belt.

Chris D'Appolonia

Linebacker | 6-3 | 225 | Fr. | Cranberry Township, Pa.-Seneca Valley

Chris D'Appolonia was named a Big 56 first team all-conference selection. He was also named as a part of the Sweet 16 defense by Butler Eagle newspaper.

CC Ezirim

Tight End | 6-7 | 235 | Fr. | Dublin, Ohio-Dublin Jerome

CC Ezirim was a two-time letterwinner at Dublin Jerome High School. He was an academic all-conference honoree during his career and earned two all-conference accolades on the basketball court. Ezirim lettered four times in track and field and three times in basketball.

Travion Ford

Defensive End | 6-4 | 265 | Fr. (R) | St. Louis, Mo.-Lutheran North/Missouri

Travion Ford is a transfer from Missouri, where he signed as a member of its 2021 recruiting class. A four-star prospect and the No. 139 ranked player in the ESPN300, he was a Sports Illustrated High School All-American candidate entering the 2020 season. In an abbreviated 2020 season, Ford posted 28 tackles 13.0 tackles for loss, 6.0 sacks, and recovered a fumble. The previous season as a junior, he collected 37 tackles, 20 TFL, and nine sacks. Ford was the state of Missouri's Class 3 Defensive Player of the Year as a senior and a three-time all-state honoree.

Amare Garrett**Cornerback | 5-11 | 180 | Fr. | St. Petersburg, Fla.-Lakewood**

Amare Garret was a three-year letterwinner at Lakewood High School. Last season he totaled 31 tackles and two interceptions. As a junior he tallied 34 tackles and eight passes defended.

RJ Johnson III**Quarterback | 6-2 | 200 | Fr. | Atlanta, Ga.-Westlake**

RJ Johnson III is a three-star prospect, according to 247 Sports. He was named first team all-state as a senior and made the MaxPreps All-American team as a sophomore. Twice he has won his high school team's Offensive Player of the Year award.

Mason Ludwig**Offensive Lineman | 6-5 | 285 | Fr. | East Liverpool, Ohio-East Liverpool**

A three-star prospect according to 247 Sports, Mason Ludwig earned three all-conference, all-county, and all-state honors at East Liverpool High School, including first team All-Ohio accolades as a junior and senior. He earned the "Block of Granite" Award from WKBN and WTOV-9 in Youngstown as the area's best interior lineman as a senior.

Shawn Munnerlyn**Wide Receiver | 6-5 | 220 | So. | Columbus, Ohio-Independence/Rutgers**

A former three-star recruit according to 247 Sports, Shawn Munnerlyn started his career at Rutgers. At Independence High School, he caught 42 passes for 935 yards and 14 touchdowns. His most productive season came in 2019 when he caught 19 passes for 409 yards and six scores as a junior.

David Nwaogwugwu**Offensive Lineman | 6-5 | 305 | Sr. | Bronx, N.Y.-DeWitt Clinton/Rutgers**

David Nwaogwugwu played the last two seasons at Rutgers after beginning his collegiate career at Temple. He appeared in eight games for the Scarlet Knights and 10 games for the Owls, making two starts. A 2019 American Athletic Conference All-Academic Team selection, Nwaogwugwu was a three-star recruit coming out of high school and a four-year letterwinner at DeWitt Clinton High School.

Rod Orr**Offensive Lineman | 6-6 | 300 | So. | Gadsden, Ala.-Gadsden/Florida State**

A former four-star prospect and the No. 22-ranked offensive tackle coming out of high school, Orr redshirted his first season at Florida State and did not appear in a game in 2022. At Gadsden High School he earned first-team all-state honors as a senior and was selected to play in the Alabama-Mississippi All-Star Game.

Wayne Peart II**Defensive Tackle | 6-4 | 285 | Fr. | Pembroke Pines, Fla.-Chaminade Madonna**

A three-star prospect according to 247 Sports, Wayne Peart II helped lead Chaminade Madonna College Preparatory School to three state championships in 2019, 2021, and 2022. As a senior this past fall, he recorded 51 tackles, 16.5 tackles for loss, and 10 sacks. He tallied 50 tackles and eight sacks as a junior.

Cole Rhett**Offensive Lineman | 6-7 | 315 | Fr. | Columbus, Ohio-Bishop Watterson**

Cole Rhett is a three-star prospect according to 247 Sports. He was named first team All-CCL as a senior.

Laith Shamma**Defensive End | 6-6 | 250 | Fr. | Ann Arbor, Mich.-Ann Arbor Huron**

Laith Shamma is a three-star prospect according to 247 Sports. As a senior he was named all-area Dream

Team as well as first team all-conference.

Sam Smith, Jr.

Wide Receiver | 6-4 | 210 | Fr. | Delta, Ohio-Wauseon

Sam Smith Jr. is a three-star prospect according to 247 Sports. In his senior season, he was named first team all-league and second team all-district. As a junior, he was named second team all-league as well as second team all-district. In his sophomore season he was named honorable mention all-league. Smith was a three-year letter winner, totaling 98 catches, 2,057 all-purpose yards and 20 touchdowns.

Donivon Thomas

Outside Linebacker | 6-5 | 220 | Fr. | Chattanooga, Tenn.-Brainerd

The Chattanooga Times Free Press named Donivon Thomas one of its "Dynamite Dozen" prior to the start of the 2022 season as one of the area's top high school players.

Nicholas Thompson

Cornerback | 6-2 | 193 | Fr. | Fort Wayne, Ind.-Bishop Luers

Nicholas Thompson is a three-star prospect according to 247 Sports. He played both ways for Bishop Luers High School, registering 79 tackles and two interceptions on the defensive end, and catching 55 passes for 1,029 yards and eight touchdowns on offense. Thompson earned all-state accolades from the Indiana Football Coaches Association as a senior in 2022.

Connor Walendzak

Running Back | 5-11 | 200 | Fr. | Perrysburg, Ohio-Perrysburg

Connor Walendzak is a three-star prospect according to 247 Sports. During his high school career he totaled 4,274 rushing yards, 74 total touchdowns, and 673 receiving yards. Walendzak was named first team All-Ohio at running back in 2020, and second team All-Ohio in 2021. He was named Toledo Blade Player of the Year in 2022, and offensive district player of the year in 2021 and 2022. Walendzak was also named first team All-NLL in 2020, 2021 and 2022, as well as NLL Player of the Year in 2022.

Jediyah Willoughby

Wide Receiver | 6-1 | 198 | Fr. | Fairburn, Ga.-Langston Hughes

Jediyah Willoughby recently wrapped up a successful prep career at Langston Hughes High School, helping his team go 15-0 and win the school's first 6A State Championship in December. This past season he tallied 39 catches for 653 yards and 10 touchdowns, averaging 12.3 yards per catch. He also rushed for 184 yards and four touchdowns. Willoughby helped lead Langston Hughes to a No. 15 national ranking according to MaxPreps.

Grant Zimmerly

Offensive Lineman | 6-4 | 285 | Fr. | Perrysburg, Ohio-Perrysburg

A three-start prospect according to 247 sports, Grant Zimmerly earned second-team all-state honors at Perrysburg High School. As a senior he was named first team All-NLL, as well a first team all-area player by the Toledo Blade.

2023 Toledo Football Recruiting Class

Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Cl.	Hometown-High School/Transfer or P
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Allen, Julian	WR	6-1	198	Fr.	Clearwater, Fla.-Clearwater Central Catholic
Awls, Braden	DB	6-1	175	Fr.	Sylvania, Ohio-Toledo Central Catholic
Bishop, Brian "Bucky"*	K	6-2	175	Fr.	Toledo, Ohio-Central Catholic
Brueggemann, Trey*	LB	6-1	205	Fr.	Bedford, Mich.-Bedford
Cherry, Micah	CB	6-3	175	Jr.	Petal, Miss.-Petal/Pearl River CC
D'Appolonia, Chris	LB	6-3	225	Fr.	Cranberry Township, Pa.-Seneca Valley
Ezirim, CC	TE	6-7	235	Fr.	Dublin, Ohio-Dublin Jerome
Ford, Travion	DE	6-4	285	Fr. (R)	St. Louis, Mo.-Lutheran North/Missouri
Garrett, Amare	CB	5-11	180	Fr.	St. Petersburg, Fla-Lakewood
Hammer, Bryson*	WR	5-11	170	Fr.	Fremont, Ohio-Fremont Ross
Hohler, Dylan*	ATH	6-4	185	Fr.	Huron, Ohio-Huron
Holmes, Kaden*	QB	5-11	170	Fr.	Fremont, Ohio-Fremont Ross
Holt, Drew*	OL	6-1	288	Fr.	Akron, Ohio-Archbishop Hoban
Huss, Tommy*	DE	6-3	218	Fr.	Bedford, Mich.-Bedford
Johnson III, RJ	QB	6-2	200	Fr.	Atlanta, Ga.-Westlake
Ludwig, Mason	OL	6-5	285	Fr.	East Liverpool, Ohio-East Liverpool
Munnerlyn, Shawn	WR	6-5	220	So.	Columbus, Ohio-Independence/Rutgers
Nwaogwugwu, David	OL	6-5	305	Sr.	Bronx, N.Y.-DeWitt Clinton/Rutgers
Orr, Rod	OT	6-6	300	So.	Gadsden, Ala.-Gadsden/Florida State
Peart II, Wayne	DT	6-4	285	Fr.	Pembroke Pines, Fla.-Chaminade Madonna
Potter, Zach*	TE	6-5	230	Fr.	Franklin, Ohio-Bishop Fenwick
Rhett, Cole	OL	6-7	315	Fr.	Columbus, Ohio-Bishop Watterson

Shamma, Laith	DE	6-6	250	Fr.	Ann Arbor, Mich.-Ann Arbor Huron
Smith Jr, Sam	WR	6-4	210	Fr.	Delta, Ohio-Wauseon
Thomas, Donivon	OLB	6-5	220	Fr.	Chattanooga, Tenn.-Brainerd
Thompson, Nicholas	CB	6-2	193	Fr.	Fort Wayne, Ind.-Bishop Luers
Walendzak, Connor	RB	5-11	200	Fr.	Perrysburg, Ohio-Perrysburg
Willoughby, Jedyiah	WR	6-1	198	Fr.	Fairburn, Ga.-Langston Hughes
Zimmerly, Grant	OL	6-4	285	Fr.	Perrysburg, Ohio-Perrysburg

*** Walk-On**

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Cherry, Micah	CB	6-3	175	Jr.	Petal, Miss.-Petal/Pearl River
D'Appolonia, Chris	LB	6-3	225	Fr.	Cranberry Township, Pa.-Seneca Valley
Ford, Travion	DE	6-4	285	Fr. (R)	St. Louis, Mo.-Lutheran North/Missouri
Garrett, Amare	CB	5-11	180	Fr.	St. Petersburg, Fla-Lakewood
Johnson III, RJ	QB	6-2	200	Fr.	Atlanta, Ga.-Westlake
Ludwig, Mason	OL	6-5	285	Fr.	East Liverpool, Ohio-East Liverpool
Munnerlyn, Shawn	WR	6-5	220	So.	Columbus, Ohio-Independence/Rutgers
Pearl II, Wayne	DT	6-4	285	Fr.	Pembroke Pines, Fla.-Chaminade Madonna
Rhett, Cole	OL	6-7	315	Fr.	Columbus, Ohio-Bishop Watterson
Shamma, Laith	DE	6-6	250	Fr.	Ann Arbor, Mich.-Ann Arbor Huron
Smith Jr, Sam	WR	6-4	210	Fr.	Delta, Ohio-Wauseon
Thompson, Nicholas	CB	6-2	193	Fr.	Fort Wayne, Ind.-Bishop Luers
Walendzak, Connor	RB	5-11	200	Fr.	Perrysburg, Ohio-Perrysburg
Zimmerly, Grant	OL	6-4	285	Fr.	Perrysburg, Ohio-Perrysburg