

Spartans land first 2013 recruit in Schilling

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By Dave Telep | ESPN.com

Look, sometimes it's a lot easier to see the forest through the trees. For instance, Julius Randle's decision was a tough read. Kansas, Kentucky? Home to Texas? Rejoin his USA Basketball coach at Florida? That one was complicated (UK eventually was the pick).

For center Gavin Schilling (Chicago/Findlay Prep), I went to my favorite show "Criminal Minds" and stole their techniques. All you needed to dissect this decision was a working profile. To me, all signs pointed to Michigan State, his eventual choice.

Schilling is a young senior. He's a kid who has a knack for playing in the lane, can be tough and rebounds his position well (sound like a Spartan big?). His recruitment came down to UCLA, Michigan State, Villanova and Minnesota. Each program could use him but the reality is, he's a four-year guy who will grow into his role not assume stardom as a freshman (East Lansing anyone?).

Some of the schools needed him a little more than the others but only one school on the list hadn't signed a player yet in the 2013 class: Michigan State. In the end, the Spartans added Schilling in large part due to the fact Tom Izzo didn't promise playing time up front.

Credit Schilling. Despite averaging 13.5 points and nine rebounds this year at Findlay, he knows he's a down-the-road recruit, not All-Big Ten stud right out of the gate. You can bet Izzo played that card with him and told the young man he would like to coach him and most importantly, develop him.

Schilling's a Chicago kid moonlighting for a year in Vegas on the nation's No. 1 team. He played alongside Jabari Parker, Michigan State's No. 1 target in the 2013 class, in AAU ball. When Parker and Schilling played this summer, somebody from MSU was watching. They didn't get Parker but they did land Schilling.

As Schilling's recruitment evolved, so did Izzo's presence. The MSU staff went with a frenzied approach around Christmas and saw him multiple times, many visits came immediately after missing on Parker. Izzo watched Schilling in Dayton, Ohio, before tracking him down off the beaten path to Dyer Co., Tenn.

It sounds to me like Schilling bought into the concept that Izzo knew enough about his game that the coach would value not only who he is, but also where he is along his journey. In short, Schilling is now free to develop at his own rate instead of feeling the heat to squeeze into a lineup before he's truly ready.

In the end, we're talking about a high school senior that doesn't turn 18 until Nov. 10. He'll be the youngest player in Michigan State's program. He'll also be coached by Izzo, a guy who takes great pride in bringing along bigs – over four years – within his program. Schilling's decision to attend Michigan State tells me he sees the big picture and listened intently to the Spartans' straightforward pitch. He, like Izzo, is in it for the long haul.