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Snow College producing players ready for next level

By [Jeff Call](#)

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Call it the Snow -ball effect.

Among the players that perennially fill the football roster at Snow College — like many other junior colleges around the country — are late-bloomers and those who were simply overlooked in high school. Every year, a handful of Badgers move on up to Division I programs and this season is no exception, as a few more are expected to sign national letters of intent in the coming weeks and months.

"That's what makes coaching at this level enjoyable, just being able to help these guys develop and find a better place to play than they would have otherwise," said coach Jeff Kilts, who guided Snow to a 9-1 record, a victory in the Golden Isles Bowl and a No. 4 final NJCAA ranking in the national polls.

Ephraim may be a small, out-of-the-way town in the middle of Utah, but Division I recruiters have no trouble finding it as they search for fresh JC talent they hope will provide immediate help to their teams.

"When we go to a bowl game, there are usually 50-60 coaches from Division I programs watching us practice for bowl and watching the bowl itself," Kilts said.

Wide receiver Ameen Shaheen is being recruited by BYU, Iowa and Kansas State while highly sought-after offensive tackle Duce Lutui has narrowed his choices to BYU, Southern California and Nebraska. Lutui, a Mesa, Ariz., native, is a cousin of Cougar offensive lineman Ofa Moheatau.

"He's a great athlete and a powerful guy," Kilts said of Lutui, who plans to sign with a school in February. "We really don't know how much he weighs. Our scale goes to 350 and my best guess is 380 to 390. When we did agility tests this fall, he tested in the linebacker range. He's an agile kid. He's got about every school in the country after him, or at least talking to him."

Utah and Florida are among the schools vying for the services of tight end Logan Hall while defensive lineman Dustin Schroeder, a Highland High product, is also attracting attention.

Again, this is nothing new for Snow, which boasts a long-standing reputation of producing Division I players. Several years ago, Badger quarterback Josh Heupel transferred to Oklahoma. All he did was lead the Sooners to a national championship in 2000 and finish second in the Heisman Trophy balloting.

"When Heupel was with us, he left for Christmas break and I thought he was going to sign with New Mexico," Kilts said. "We knew he had a (recruiting) trip set up to Oklahoma but we didn't think anything



Georgia Military's Brandon Issac attempts to tackle Snow receiver Josh Johnson.

Bobby Haven, Associated Press

would come out of that. The rest is history. That's why we preach to the kids to stay patient. Every year it's a parade of those kinds of schools through our building. It's fun to see the kids go through that process."

A few years ago, wide receiver Aaron Boone, a Millard High product, went on to play at Kentucky. Last year, quarterback Paul Peterson, from Bingham High, transferred from Snow to Boston College and he helped guide the Eagles to a 7-5 record this season and a date in the San Francisco Bowl against Colorado State.

"(Peterson) has proven himself at a big college," said Snow quarterback Jason Coutts, who backed up Peterson in 2002 and became the starter in 2003. "We're excited and hopefully that will open doors for guys. I think it has. Every year, more and more big schools are looking at Snow's players."

"Snow's kind of gold mine of JC players," Shaheen said. "There are great athletes here. Given a shot, we can prove we can play at the Division I level."

Shaheen (6-foot-4, 220 pounds) finished up his career at North Sevier High in 1998 (he was a member of the Deseret News 2A First Team) before departing for an LDS mission to Hawaii. When he returned, he found a home at Snow, where he starred the last two seasons.

"He's an athletic kid," Kilts said of Shaheen, who was scheduled to take his official recruiting trip to BYU this weekend. "He's real similar to Aaron Boone. He's probably Aaron Boone with speed."

"Shaheen has done a lot for our team the last two years," Coutts said. "He's made some great catches with the game on the line. He does what it takes to get us a first down or the touchdown. His best asset is, you give him the ball and he will break tackles and get extra yards."

Was Shaheen's talent undiscovered while he was at North Sevier, or was he simply able to polish his abilities at Snow?

"With him, it's probably a thing where he developed the last couple of years," Kilts said. "When he came out of North Sevier, we were aware of him, but it's not known as a football powerhouse. We liked him on film. He went on a mission first, then came back to us. Some of our better players going to big schools are guys who went on missions first or they went to Ricks and redshirted, then came back and are unknown and slipped through the cracks. They have that extra two years of maturity on them."

"I'm grateful for the coaches here who have taught me so much and allowed me to play," Shaheen said. "I talk to (Paul Peterson) once a week still. He says, 'You have every ability to play at this level.' There are great athletes at the smaller high schools that sometimes, maybe because they don't get to face 5A competition, get overlooked. But they're still able to compete athletically with players at the bigger schools."

Year after year, Snow College produces players who are proof of that.

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