

Battle At Right Tackle Rages



Since flipping sides of the line, it seems as though redshirt junior Josh Fryar will be anchoring Ohio State's offensive line at the marquee left tackle spot.

So, what was thought to be a battle to be the starting left tackle has also flipped sides to be a war waged for the starting right tackle spot. Two names have emerged as the frontrunners — redshirt sophomore Zen Michalski and redshirt freshman Tegra Tshabola.

"We're rolling a lot of guys (on the offensive line)," offensive line coach Justin Frye said March 23. "We're rolling a ton of guys with the 1s, but we like it that way. So you're getting to see some young guys that haven't played do some things, you're getting to see some guys do some positions that they might not have started at that they're moving to."

Michalski has been groomed at left tackle for each of the past two seasons, and this winter and spring he's focused on making the transition to the opposite side.

"It's just a lot about rebuilding that muscle memory, because all I've ever known is left tackle," Michalski said. "I was a later offensive line kind of a guy, so it's tough. But I've gotten better every practice at it so I have high hopes."

Entering his third year in the program, it has the feeling of a make-or-break year for the Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central product. His high school ran a run-heavy offense, so while he had a mauler's mentality coming into Columbus, it was his pass blocking that needed the most development.

Putting in work with now-former Ohio State All-American offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. last offseason and this current one, Michalski feels he's grown a lot in all facets of his game, but especially when it comes to protecting his quarterback.

"I feel great," Michalski said. "Talking to Paris a lot last year, he's one of my best friends, he was in a similar position to where I was in last year. He was going from right guard to left tackle, which is obviously a harder transition, though he had already played left tackle his freshman year. But just seeing how Paris battled through learning a new position, because it's hard. I'm learning a new position against Jack (Sawyer) and J.T. (Tuimoloau), some of the best defensive linemen in the country. So a lot of it is patience, you're not going to fix everything in one day."

Tshabola enters the competition with a bit more recruiting pedigree, ranked 104th overall and 10th at

offensive tackle in the class of 2023. He moves well for his 6-6, 327-pound frame, but in year two there's still some growing for him to do to meet the expectations of an Ohio State offensive tackle.

From his perspective, he said last season was about getting humbled. He wanted to just fire out and play aggressive and attack all the time, but he had to learn to stay measured against players like Ohio State defensive ends Sawyer and Tuimoloau.

"In high school, I used to just want to grab you and kill somebody, take them out," Tshabola said. "But here, there's a lot of good football players. You have to stay calm in that aggression, direct it."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day feels this is a big year for Michalski. If he's ever to start at OSU, he can't let an underclassmen take an open job from him.

"This is a big year for him," Day said in the first week of spring practice. "This is year three and so again, I don't think we'll get an idea until we put the pads on, but even then, we were talking about it as an offensive staff at this time last year and even into the middle and towards the end of spring our guys had a hard time blocking our front."

Frye agreed with Tshabola's assessment of himself but also wants to restore some of his confidence and make him as impactful collegiately as he was in high school. He added that, as a younger player, there's some inconsistency that he's still working out in terms of missed assignments and mental lapses.

"Tegra was an elite-level player in high school, he's an All-American, he does All-Star games, all this stuff," Frye said. "Then he shows up here and he's Tegra the freshman. So for him to see that (he needs to be more measured), good. Now how do you get back to playing to your level? You work through those base fundamentals. We have to have great effort and technique. That's what we were focusing on today. So if you're a high-level player and you have great effort and great technique, then you'll produce at a high level."

Michalski worked in with the first group of offensive linemen at Ohio State's scrimmage, but both he and Tshabola had issues against some of the team's better defensive ends. With only a handful of practices having gone by in the spring, there's still plenty of time for one of them to win the day at the spot.