

Column: The Freshman Could Have Something To Say For Ohio State



When Ohio State's offense struggled throughout the majority of the spring game - even requiring the assistance of two-time Heisman Trophy winner Archie Griffin, who was more than happy to oblige - it wasn't the likes of Marvin Harrison Jr. or any of the running backs who have spent years on the Buckeyes' roster that stepped up to close the eventual 40-31 deficit.

No, the only passing touchdowns of the game wound up in the arms of Noah Rogers (57 yards from Tristan Gebbia) and Carnell Tate (37 yards from Kyle McCord), a pair of freshman making their first appearance on the turf at Ohio Stadium. Rogers finished with a team-high 64 receiving yards on three receptions, while Tate added three catches for 45 yards.

Scale of 1-10: How excited are you about Carnell Tate? [@carnelltate_ x @OhioStateFB pic.twitter.com/yoZ70X7pFP](https://pic.twitter.com/yoZ70X7pFP)

— Ohio State on BTN (@OhioStateOnBTN) April 15, 2023

For good measure, freshman tight end Jelani Thurman brought in three catches for 25 yards, and freshman wideout Bryson Rodgers also had a catch that went for 3 yards. All told, the freshmen receivers totaled 137 receiving yards and 10 receptions, a solid day's work for the group.

But, that type of performance in the spring game - as it often does at Ohio State - could be an indicator for future success, even as soon as this season. Look no further than the words of cornerback Denzel Burke, who has to cover these receivers in practice, when asked about who fans should look at as a breakout candidate this season.

"Carnell Tate," Burke quickly responded. "Just know he's a dog."

Ohio State is a notoriously difficult school to crack into the depth chart, especially so for a player who has only been on campus for a few months compared to some entering their fifth or sixth (or even seventh, in the case of Gebbia) season of college football. But it isn't unheard of, and as Ohio State looks to get these younger players involved, they will capitalize on those opportunities to shine as they did on Saturday.

While the defense won the day, the defensive freshman had a more muted outing, though notable all the same. Freshman cornerback Jermaine Mathews and freshman safety Malik Hartford each notched a pass breakup, contributing to the team's total of 10 balls batted down, and appear as though they fit right into an Ohio State secondary that has been preaching advanced ball skills all spring.

And don't forget about those second-year players, either. The top three tacklers (linebacker Gabe Powers with eight, linebacker C.J. Hicks with six and safety Sonny Styles with six, the latter two each notching two pass breakups) are each entering their second years in the program, and defensive tackle Hero Kanu had one of the game's biggest outings with five tackles, a sack and two tackles for loss.

All that to say that the future - on both sides of the ball - is bright if Ohio State continues to lean into the youth movement that showed out in the spring game.