

Denzel Burke, Caleb Downs and JT Tuimoloau Selected To Lott IMPACT Trophy Watch List



A trio of Buckeye defenders earned some early flowers earlier this week when cornerback Denzel Burke, safety Caleb Downs and defensive end JT Tuimoloau were all selected to the Lott IMPACT Trophy watch list, which honors the defensive player in college football who makes the biggest impact both on and off the field when it comes to integrity, maturity, performance, academics, community and tenacity.

The award, which is named after Pro Football Hall of Famer and former Pittsburgh Steelers and USC safety Ronnie Lott, released its watch list on Thursday, which includes 42 nominees for the award. Some notable names on this list include Penn State defensive back Abdul Carter, Michigan defensive tackle Mason Graham, Colorado cornerback Travis Hunter and Michigan cornerback Will Johnson. Ohio State is the only school to have three players on this watch list.

Burke, Downs and Tuimolau are arguably the three most important pieces on Ohio State's defense next season, a unit that returns nearly double-digit starters, many of them who are returning for their senior seasons. Burke and Tuimolau fit that billing, with both spending three productive seasons with the Buckeyes each before returning to Columbus for one final season despite having significant draft buzz surrounding them.

Burke is coming off a career year with Ohio State, where he earned first-team All-Big Ten honors after emerging as the team's lockdown No. 1 corner with a team-leading eight pass breakups along with 24 tackles (3.0 for loss), an interception and a forced fumble. Tuimoloau also put together a strong junior season with 38 tackles (7.0 for loss) five sacks, a team-leading six quarterback hurries, two pass breakups and a fumble recovery, stats that earned him his second straight first-team all-conference nod.

While Downs is two years younger than the two Buckeye veterans and is also entering his first season in the Scarlet and Gray, he is still expected to produce at a high-level in a safety-driven Jim Knowles defense this season. Downs is coming off a spectacular freshman season at Alabama where he racked up a whopping 107 tackles - the most by a Crimson Tide freshman in the last 50-plus years — along

with five pass deflections, two interceptions, a fumble recovery, a forced fumble and one punt return touchdown, earning second-team All-American and SEC Freshman of the Year honors in the process.

Downs is expected to slot into the starting free safety role for the Buckeyes this upcoming season, where he — along with Burke and Tuimoloau — will look to help the veteran scarlet and gray defense transform into one of the nation's best for a second straight season.

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