

Denzel Burke, Caleb Downs Named To Jim Thorpe Award Preseason Watch List



Ohio State continued to receive recognition for some national honors this week, with cornerback Denzel Burke and safety Caleb Downs being named to the preseason watch list for the Jim Thorpe Award on Wednesday, presented annually to the top defensive back in college football.

BIA takes on @jimthorpeaward with 2 Preseason selections □
@DenzelBurke10 x @caleb_downs2 pic.twitter.com/KtycVAd4RL

— Ohio State Football (@OhioStateFB) July 31, 2024

Ohio State is one of five schools to have two defensive backs featured on the watch list, along with Appalachian State (Ethan Johnson and Jordan Favors), Boise State (A'Marion McCoy and Seyi Oladipo), Georgia (Daylen Everette and Malaki Starks) and Notre Dame (Benjamin Morrison and Xavier Watts).

The Big Ten had the most representation with 10 players featured, including Michigan's Will Johnson, Oregon's Jabbar Muhammad and Wisconsin's Hunter Wohler.

Burke is named to the Jim Thorpe preseason watch list for the second consecutive season. Electing to return for his fourth and final season with the program, he is expected to be one of the top cornerbacks in the nation after a sensational junior season in which he recorded 24 tackles (three for loss), a team-high nine pass deflections, one interception and one forced fumble while earning first-team All-Big Ten honors by coaches.

With another successful season at Ohio State, Burke could find himself as one of the first defensive backs taken in next spring's NFL draft held at historic Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisc.

Downs may have a career story than Burke, as it is his first season with the Buckeyes opposed to

Burke's fourth, but he may have the same, if not more, expectations as his elder teammate. The sophomore is set to serve as the starting free safety for Ohio State this season after a historic freshman season at Alabama in which he recorded 107 tackles — the most by an Alabama freshman in at least the last 50 years — along with five pass deflections, two interceptions, a forced fumble, a fumble recovery and an 87-yard punt return touchdown.

Downs, who also earned first-team All-SEC as well as first-and-second-team All-American honors from multiple media outlets, instantly turned heads with his performance during spring camp, and he could further solidify himself as one of the top defenders on Jim Knowles' vaunted defense with a strong string of fall practices.

"He's different," Burke said when asked about Downs at Big Ten Media Days last Tuesday. "He's wired in. He's smart. He knows the game a lot, inside-out. He's my golf buddy, too, so he's a good friend of mine."

Burke and Downs have now been named to three preseason award watch lists, including the Bronko Nagurski Trophy for the best defensive player in college football and the Lott IMPACT Trophy for the defensive player who makes the biggest impact for the team both on and off the field based on integrity, maturity, performance, academics, community and tenacity.