

Denzel Burke The “Leader” Of Ohio State’s Cornerbacks Room



It’s no secret that Ohio State junior cornerback Denzel Burke is looking for a bounce-back year in 2023.

Fresh off a freshman campaign in which he turned heads by starting and racking up 12 pass breakups and an interception, Burke saw his play dip both quantitatively with a mere five pass breakups and qualitatively, giving up many more big catches as he struggled through injury in 2022.

This year, Burke has set his gaze on a turnaround.

“Going into this year, it’s a personal year for me,” Burke said during the spring. “I want to prove all the doubters wrong. I’m going to go out there and do what I know I can do and put a lot of great stuff on tape and play hard for my team.”

And thus far into the offseason, Burke is showing signs of progress. Not only have his injuries healed, he got his hands on more passes during the spring and has emerged as the top dog in Ohio State’s cornerbacks room.

“He had a great spring,” Ohio State cornerbacks coach Tim Walton said May 30. “He did a great job. He’s locked in. He’s our leader over there.”

It’s no one thing that has set Burke ahead of where he was last year as well, Walton added. He’s improved holistically as a player.

“It’s a combination of everything,” Walton said. “He got hurt last year. Now, he’s healthy all spring. It’s his second year in the system. He’s locked in, he’s dialed in with it. He’s one of the leaders in the room.”

That maturation process and improvement is something Ohio State will be looking for not only from its corners, who were at times one of the weaker units on the team in 2022, but from the rest of its defense. Specifically in big games like those against Michigan and Georgia last year.

Competition is open for starting spots, although Walton noted that it's hard to see Burke being supplanted from one of them. Ole Miss transfer Davison Igbinosun impressed with his length and athleticism in the spring, while junior Jordan Hancock was raved about during last season's fall camp before going down with a hamstring injury that he never seemed to fully recover from.

Then Ohio State went out and added former Notre Dame wide receiver Lorenzo Styles Jr., older brother of safety Sonny Styles, at corner to add to its depth. Jyaire Brown and Ryan Turner will be looking to make strides in their respective second years.

If the Buckeyes can count on Burke as their cornerstone at cornerback, it will be a critical piece for the secondary to build around.