

Film Friday: Payton Pierce's Mentality, Athleticism Stand Out



At the time Lucas (Texas) Lovejoy four-star linebacker Payton Pierce committed to Ohio State, he was just the second defensive pledge in a class that already held eight commitments on the offensive side of the ball.

A complement to fellow four-star linebacker Garrett Stover of Sunbury (Ohio) Big Walnut, Pierce is the No. 170 prospect nationally in the 247Sports composite and 16th-best linebacker.

What attributes does he show on film? Let's dive in. To view the full highlight reel these clips were pulled from, visit here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBVBs97sjdA>



One of the first things that stands out about Pierce on tape is how quickly he can cover ground.

He's lined up as a backside linebacker on this play, and despite it being a sweep the opposite direction, he surges into the opposing backfield and wraps up the opposing running back for a tackle for loss.

Pierce keeps his head up and scrapes close to the line of scrimmage to track down the ball carrier just before he can turn the corner. In a two-linebacker system such as Ohio State's, having such athleticism in space is of great importance.



This clip is a tremendous showcase of athleticism, mentality and linebacking technique from Pierce against the run.

There's two offensive players you can key on as a linebacker to diagnose plays, the running backs and the guards. Different coaches teach one or the other to read, but here Pierce uses the backside guard — which is personally what I think is best — to take him to the ball carrier.

Guards will always take you to the ball. That's why Pierce accelerates toward the pulling guard's hip at the snap then moves his attention to the backfield, where he sees the opposing running back following his lead blocker.

Pierce then gets a chance to demonstrate the violence he can bring to the position. He explodes through contact with the running back, pile-driving him into the ground following a hit that shakes the rusher's whole upper body.



Again, it's Pierce's eyes and physicality that really pop on some of these plays. This is a phenomenal stack-and-shed of a bigger offensive lineman to get to the opposing quarterback, but it's the eyes that make it all work.

Even when engaging, Pierce keeps his head up to hunt for the ball. Once he's able to shed his blocker, he's already on a perfect line to intercept the quarterback as he tries to scramble. From there he shows strong recovery speed to secure the tackle.

There's still areas of Pierce's game that will need improvement, outside the obvious physical developments that almost every high school prospect needs to adjust to the collegiate game. His highlight reel was lean on pass coverage and he didn't sit very comfortably in zone before making some nice athletic plays on the few there were.

All that said, he's got the makings of a future impact player at Ohio State, someone who could even play above his recruiting ranking with proper development. A lot of physical and mental tools are there.