

Four Ohio State Players Named To The Nagurski Award Watch List



When sophomore safety Caleb Downs made the decision to transfer to Ohio State in January, many pundits predicted the Buckeyes' defense would be amongst the best in the country. Tuesday, the Buckeyes' four inclusions on the watch list for the Nagurski Award, given to the nation's best defender, was the most of any team in the country. Senior defensive end JT Tuimoloau, senior cornerback Denzel Burke, Downs and senior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams were given the honor of making the preseason watch list.

4 Buckeyes earn @NagurskiTrophy Watch List honors □
@DenzelBurke10 @tyleikk @caleb_downs2 @JT_Tuimoloau pic.twitter.com/axlqMYbNRH

— Ohio State Football (@OhioStateFB) July 30, 2024

Ohio State was closely followed by Georgia and Iowa for the most players included on the list, as both teams had three.

Downs' inclusion on the 2024 watch list should come as no surprise. The former SEC freshman of the year, and first-team All-SEC recipient at Alabama, was ranked as the best player available in the transfer portal by 247 before committing to Ohio State. As a freshman, Downs led the Crimson Tide with a staggering 107 total tackles, 30 more than his next closest teammate. Additionally, Downs recorded two interceptions, a forced fumble, and 3.5 tackles for loss in 2023.

Tuimoloau, who burst onto the scene during Ohio State's 44-31 win at Penn State in 2022, with two interceptions, a forced fumble and two sacks, bypassed a potential early selection in the 2024 NFL draft to come back for another year with the Buckeyes. Tuimoloau improved his sack numbers as a junior,

finishing his 2023 campaign with five sacks. After impressive numbers in his sophomore and junior seasons, Tuimoloau was named to two consecutive first-team All Big-Ten selections.

Like Tuimoloau, Burke had a similar opportunity to hear his name called in the first few rounds of the 2024 NFL draft but decided to stay for his senior year at Ohio State. Burke had one interception and a forced fumble in back to back weeks early in the 2023 season, setting the tone for what would become a first-team All-Big Ten caliber year.

Tyleik Williams, Ohio State's 330-pound defensive lineman, is yet another talented Buckeye veteran poised to improve on a stellar junior season that saw him go for three sacks. Williams' production in the middle of Ohio State's defensive line earned him a selection on the second team All-Big Ten.

Other notable entries on the Nagurski list include, linebackers Abdul Carter (Penn State), Jay Higgins (Iowa), Nick Jackson (Iowa) and Hunter Wohler (Wisconsin), cornerbacks Sebastian Castro (Iowa), Travis Hunter (Colorado) and Will Johnson (Michigan), defensive tackle Mason Graham (Michigan) and safety Dillon Thieneman (Purdue).