

Jim Knowles Looking To Call More Blitzes In 2024



The 2024 Ohio State defense is striving for nothing less than perfection according to defensive coordinator Jim Knowles.

“The important point to get across to our guys, Vince Lombardi said it, ‘you have to chase perfection,’” Knowles said Friday morning at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center following Ohio State’s second practice of fall camp. “It’s impossible, but you catch excellence in the process. We can never be satisfied with just being good, I mean we have the guys to really reach for perfection, and we just have to keep pushing for that.”

In the last game of the 2023 season in the Cotton Bowl against Missouri, Ohio State’s defense was very close to perfection. Only able to muster up three points offensively during the entire game, the Buckeyes defense needed to be perfect for the team to win the game. For the three quarters, the Buckeyes virtually were perfect. However, entering the final frame with a 3-0 lead, the Buckeyes surrendered two touchdowns to lose 14-3. The unfortunate result for the Buckeyes was in part due to Knowles’ hesitance to blitz, according to the man himself.

“Sometimes you reach those points where you just don’t want to be the one to mess them up,” Knowles said. “I think that’s the balance of, ‘hey we’re going good let’s just keep it going,’ but when you stay in anything too long and you become predictable, it really doesn’t matter who you’re playing.”

Knowles went on to tie some of the successes of Missouri’s deep passing in its 14-point fourth quarter to the team’s knowledge of what Ohio State was running, allowing a receiver to come open when he was moved across the field on a route.

Ohio State’s defense in 2022, Knowles’ first year as the team’s defensive coordinator, seemed to be more aggressive in its use of blitzes; at times in 2023, the unit may have been more hesitant to do so. The Buckeyes’ blitz usage in 2023 isn’t inherently a bad thing.

Ohio State finished top three in both total defense and scoring defense, allowing only 265.4 yards per game and 11.23 points per game. Still, the unit wasn't perfect. As good as the Buckeyes were at preventing teams from moving the ball and scoring points, the defense forced just 11 turnovers, a number that had them in a tie for 121st with Ball State for most turnovers forced.

When asked about what he wanted to see as improvement from his defense, Knowles immediately went to the presentation of his defense, specifically with how many disguises they run and the amount of blitz calls.

"We need to be more aggressive in terms of the calls, getting more blitzes run, getting more pressures run, getting more d-linemen one-on-one matchups," Knowles said.

Blitzing is not only something that Knowles outlined as potential improvement for the Buckeyes, but something he says the team tracks in practice. According to Knowles, blitzing is similar to running an offensive play, where those involved with the blitz each have an assignment. With this in mind, the Buckeyes find use in blitzing in practice not as much to make plays, but more to make sure everyone is in the spot they're supposed to be.

As Knowles has found out in his two years of experience coaching with the Buckeyes, there is a fine line between being aggressive and reckless. In 2022 against Michigan, Ohio State veered more towards recklessness, allowing Michigan to score three touchdowns of at least 45 yards in the second half.

Some blitzes are bound to be burnt, but it's Knowles' job to find the right balance to help his defense chase the always-elusive perfection.

"I think that's my job is to find the middle ground," Knowles said. "Even when things are going good we need to take chances."