

Jim Knowles Looking To Fix Defensive Deficiencies That Still “Haunt” Him



It's been over five months since Ohio State's back-to-back losses to end the season against Michigan and Georgia, giving up a combined 87 points and 1,063 yards of offense across those games that resulted in a bitter end to the season for head coach Ryan Day's team.

With the Buckeyes moving fully into their summer offseason program, time has still failed to heal all wounds, as defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said last week that those mistakes against the Wolverines and Bulldogs - a bevy of defensive miscues, ranging from blown coverages to missed tackles on the biggest stage - still "haunt" him to this day.

"It's haunted me. But just haunting me, that doesn't do anybody any good, except it just keeps me up (at night). So if it's a problem, you've got to fix it," he said. "You've got to take responsibility, take accountability, then you have to say, 'OK, why did this happen?' It was a matchup or somebody just not doing something right. Well, that all comes back to me. You kind of go back to the start. You look at everything, you look at your teaching progression, and then you have to learn."

Knowles said that Ohio State's losses to Michigan and Georgia were both "matchup games" in which the Buckeyes did not get the job done, and that he is trying to figure out how to do a better job of preparing his defense for those big games, not just on an individual basis but at an organizational level.

"You've got to go back to the beginning," he said. "Anytime you try to do something that's a stop gap, or something that's just for that week, to me, you're doomed for failure. It's got to become part of your progression. It's got to be in your mind from the start. The things that didn't go well last year, how do I, from day one, start to make sure that that doesn't happen."

That came with the learning curve of his first season at Ohio State, taking over as defensive coordinator after four seasons in the same position at Oklahoma State. As a whole, the defense looked better for the Buckeyes compared to 2021, and by most metrics was viewed as a top-25 defense. But Knowles' goal - one that potentially seemed lofty, in retrospect - was for Ohio State to become a top-five defense, among the best in the country.

Defensive struggles over the final two games showed the Buckeyes were further away from their goal than they had hoped, but as Knowles takes those lessons into his second year in Columbus - not to

mention an army of returning defenders with a year under their belt in Knowles' system - he feels they can achieve the goal he set when he arrived on campus.

"There's the opportunity to be the best, in my mind," he said. "There's the opportunity to be the best. To make across-the-board improvements from what was already an improved defense, but the expectation to be a top-five defense that everyone can count on all the time. And that's there.

"I've seen enough, been around these guys, Coach (Larry Johnson), Coach (Mickey Marotti), the way they run the program," he continued. "I saw our secondary in the spring make excellent improvements. Now, everything matters, (but) nothing counts until you get to the game, right?"