

Larry Johnson Feeling Good About Depth On Ohio State's Defensive Line



Ohio State has a quartet of clear-cut starters on the defensive line this season, with defensive ends Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau wreaking havoc on the outside and Tyliek Williams and Ty Hamilton taking care of business on the inside.

But with all four returning for what should be their final seasons with the Buckeyes, defensive line coach Larry Johnson - who could be looking at a wildly different group of starters in 2025, and also wants to prepare in case of injury - is hoping to build significant depth on the defensive line this season.

"(The backups) have got to be able to come in and play 25, 35 plays a game and do it early in the season," Johnson said on Tuesday. "That's the plan, get those guys ready for the long haul. They've got to play early, they've got to play often. ... They're taking a lot of (first-team) reps."

While third-year players are generally coming into their own at Ohio State and competing for starting jobs, that is not the case for several on the defensive line, with incumbents setting things back another year for the likes of ends Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson Jr. and tackle Hero Kanu.

The trio has combined for 37 tackles (7.5 for loss), three sacks and a pass breakup over the last two seasons, but while they won't be on the field to begin games, Kanu said any opportunity to get on the field - like he did last season, getting a sack in the first game against Indiana - will be important for depth on the defensive line.

"I think that it's a big part of it, just getting more reps and more game reps overall," he said. "Just like, 'Hey, put Hero in.' I'm going on the field and then the first game I made a play. That's what it's all about. Then that gives you confidence, it gives you experience and I think all that contributed."

Curry, Jackson and Kanu will be the first to rotate in, but there are several second- and first-year players that may also contribute for the Buckeyes. Defensive tackles Kayden McDonald and Jason Moore are in their second seasons at Ohio State, and Johnson has been impressed with how both have performed this spring as they look to break into the depth chart.

"For the inside guys, I feel pretty good," he said. "Some guys are challenging for positions. Jason Moore

is starting to make a push. You've got Hero Kanu inside and then you've got K-Mac. ... Right now, it's really pushing the young guys more than I'm pushing the older guys. We're kind of shutting them down a little bit and letting these young guys get some work against the ones and twos so they get ready."

While nobody's preferred standing on the defensive line is as a backup, those who are rotating in to relieve Hamilton, Sawyer, Tuimoloau and Williams have bought in, hoping that building depth on the defensive line will help the Buckeyes achieve their goals this season.

"Our goal is to beat The Team Up North, win a championship, we can't do it just with (the starting four)," Moore said. "We need guys to come in, get them subs when they need it so they can be the best when they're on the field. For us to be able to come in and help the team, that's needed for what our goals are."