

J.T. Tuimoloau Working On Consistency Heading Into Junior Year



Ohio State junior defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau had one of the best individual defensive performances in school history last season.

On the road at Penn State, Tuimoloau recorded six tackles, three tackles for loss, two sacks including a strip sack that he recovered, two interceptions — one he returned for a touchdown — and a pass deflection that turned into another Ohio State interception.

“It’s great. It was a true blessing,” Tuimoloau said after the win Oct. 29. “We came out eleven (players) strong and showed out today.”

It was a breakout game for the then-sophomore, but his numbers on the season in totality didn’t stack up to his production that day, or the peak of production one expects from a former five-star recruit.

Take away that performance against the Nittany Lions and Tuimoloau compiled just 22 tackles and 1 1/2 sacks across 12 games. He did add 7 1/2 tackles for loss and three pass deflections to those numbers, but still, with his third and possibly final year in Columbus upon him, it’s consistency that Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson is trying to develop with Tuimoloau.

“That’s one of those games that’s once-in-a-lifetime, like a Michael Jordan moment,” Johnson said May 30. “You have that moment, you try and figure out why it happens. So we continue to try and put that together, just work on the small things. Who knows what he could be.”

In terms of developing that consistency, Johnson gave some of his thoughts back in March as to how Tuimoloau can progress. The first step is to focus inward.

“Like I always say, first block the noise. Just concentrate on who you are. Don’t worry about all the other things outside,” Johnson said. “Just concentrate on your technique and just keep getting better.”

Then it comes down to all the fine details, the small components that make up excellent defensive line play.

“It’s all the little things,” Johnson said. “Where you step, his hand placement, eye discipline, all those things are important to become an elite player. He has the talent and skill set, so how can we make him better? Well, that’s my job. I’ve got to find those little things to make him better.”

The good news for Tuimoloau, Johnson hopes, is that he won’t have to be any sort of bellcow for the defensive line to have success. Between the experience and talents of Jack Sawyer, Mike Hall, Tyleik Williams, Ty Hamilton and the depth behind them, Johnson has high expectations for his unit as a whole in 2023.

“J.T. is a good football player, but I think there’s other guys that can step up and do some things for us,” Johnson said.