

Laurinaitis Touches On Return To Ohio State In Coaching Role



From 2005-08, former Ohio State linebacker James Laurinaitis built up a reputation as one of the most feared defensive players in the Big Ten. Laurinaitis' production on the field made him a three-time All-American while, off the field, his leadership qualities allowed him to become a two-time captain for the Buckeyes.

Following his time with the Buckeyes, Laurinaitis enjoyed an eight-year career in the NFL, growing into one of the league's top linebackers with the St. Louis Rams and New Orleans Saints. After his playing career, Laurinaitis spent several years in sports media and was a graduate assistant with Notre Dame last season, where he reunited with former Buckeye teammate Marcus Freeman.

Now, Laurinaitis is back in Columbus and bestowing the knowledge that he picked up during his time as a Buckeye to the next generation of Silver Bullets.

"I love the game of football, and I love working with young people so that's why I got into coaching," Laurinaitis said. "You want to impact the kids on the field, but more importantly you want them to leave, after building relationships with them, as better men and hopefully give them an example of what being a good husband and father can be.

"It's the same thing Luke Fickell did for me and the same thing Jim Tressel did for me," he continued. "So, you pair that with your alma mater, you pair that with Columbus, Ohio, and when it became something that could happen, I asked my wife and our girls, it was pure giddiness at that point that we could be coming back home."

Although his title remains as a graduate assistant, Laurinaitis will primarily work with the linebackers — which fall under the jurisdiction of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, who also serves as Ohio State's linebackers coach.

During his time with the Buckeyes, Laurinaitis racked up 375 total tackles, which ranked seventh in program history. While Laurinaitis produced gaudy numbers as a player, his focus now is to help cultivate the same success in Ohio State's current linebackers room. With incumbent starters Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers returning for another season with the Buckeyes, Laurinaitis noted that having the duo in tow will make his life easier in his first year back with the program.

Laurinaitis served in a similar role with Notre Dame last season, serving as a graduate assistant with a focus on linebackers under defensive coordinator Al Golden.

"You have to make sure you're always speaking the same language as the defensive coordinator, especially when he's the linebackers coach," Laurinaitis said. "I had to do it a year ago under Al Golden, I was trusted with the linebackers room.

"I'm still learning all those things but from my understanding, it's really 'Hey, go and attack it' and coach the room," he continued. "It's film study, preparation, individual drills, and give (Knowles) the freedom that he really had the last few years of his career, from my understanding, is the ability to kind of walk around practice and see different areas of the game."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day also pointed to the value of having Laurinaitis' perspective as a former player in regard to his ability to coach the current crop of Buckeyes. Laurinaitis is one of several former Ohio State players on staff, a list that includes Brian Hartline, C.J. Barnett and Devin Jordan.

"These are guys that understand what it means to be a player here," Day said. "That absolutely matters. I just think whether it's a recruit and their family or whether it's a player, they've been there before and they understand what that means and what it means to be a Buckeye. For me, to have those guys a part of this thing is really important."

While Laurinaitis settles into his role with Ohio State, he emphasized his focus is on staying in the moment and coaching to his best abilities.

"For me, it all starts with, can I be the best linebackers coach in the country? And can I aspire to do that at my alma mater?" Laurinaitis said. "To me, that's the first thing that comes to mind. I'll attack this year with that vision."