

My Thoughts: Top Five Players On Ohio State's Defense



The Fan Forum on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin website has been very busy lately discussing many things, one being the stacked Ohio State defense for the 2024 season. The discussion of the top five players on that side of the ball has been a popular one, so we at BSB decided to chip in with our own lists. Patrick Engels posted his Friday.

To me, the top five defenders on the team aren't as debatable as the order those five should be in. Each of them have a good chance to be drafted in the first round of the 2025 NFL draft, along with a couple of players on the offensive side of the ball for the Buckeyes in what could be a historic draft class for the Scarlet and Gray.

Here's my list:

5. Tyleik Williams

2023 was a bit of a breakout season for Williams, who ended up having 54 tackles, 10 for a loss, three sacks, and teammate cornerback Denzel Burke even made him an honorary member of the BIA secondary with his five pass breakups. It wasn't just a few good games, from the interior defensive lineman either, he had a consistent, strong season and seems ready to keep that up going into 2024.

4. JT Tuimoloau

Another defensive lineman comes in right ahead of Williams with Tuimoloau, who has been nothing but consistent as a strong presence on the edge. In 2023, he had 38 tackles, five sacks and six quarterback hurries. He could be the best defender on a number of other competitive teams, but the Buckeyes defense is so loaded this season that there are arguably three better than he is.

3. Jack Sawyer

The Buckeyes defensive line should be a scary one this season. Sawyer had amazing potential when he joined Ohio State as a recruit, and didn't really tap into that until late last season. To rank him this high on the list based off of a few games of him showing what he can be could be a mistake, but I have no reason to think that what he did was a fluke. He has 48 tackles, 10 for a loss, 6½ sacks, three quarterback hurries and two pass breakups and I expect to see more of that this year.

2. Denzel Burke

Burke's sophomore season was plagued by minor injuries and giving up long plays at the end of the season. He came back in full force in 2023 to show that season was just a fluke, and he established himself as one of the best, if not the best, cornerbacks in the country. There's no reason he shouldn't be able to keep that up this season, and he will likely go high in the draft in a year.

1. Caleb Downs

This could be the most encouraging ranking for Buckeye fans. In the 2023 season, Ohio State's defense was one of the best in the country, giving up only 11.2 points per game, second behind Michigan (10.4 PPG allowed). To be that good a season ago, keep most of their impact players, and add a guy who was a freshman All-American at Alabama last year is probably a scary thing to think about for Ohio State's opponents this year. Downs has an argument not only for the best player on Ohio State's team, but in the country.