

New Safeties Coach Matt Guerrieri Excited For Talent In Position Room



It isn't uncommon for Ohio State to have an embarrassment of riches at different positions, but safety may be among the deepest groups for the Buckeyes this season, which is music to the ears of new safeties Matt Guerrieri.

Guerrieri - who held his first media availability on Tuesday since being hired by Ohio State in January - said he has been impressed "across the board" with the Buckeyes' depth at the position, with several returning starters, returning contributors and exciting new additions to the room.

"I think that there's guys that have played big roles," Guerrieri said. "Obviously, Caleb (Downs) wasn't here, but is here (now). You've got Malik Harford, who started games as a true freshman. There's great depth, I think, across positions on the defense here. It's our job as recruiters to be able to build that."

Safety Lathan Ransom - who will return for a fifth season and is coming off a season-ending injury - is the highlight of the room, and someone with whom Guerrieri was able to develop a strong relationship with during his first stint in Columbus as an analyst in 2022 before becoming Indiana's co-defense coordinator last season.

"It's been great," Guerrieri said. "It's familiarity. To know guys, know about their families, they know you and your family. ... Lathan is doing great. He's the heartbeat of that room. He's been through hardship before. He continues to battle back. He's a warrior."

Guerrieri will also have slot cornerback Jordan Hancock at his disposal as a returning starter along with bringing in Downs - a freshman All-American at Alabama last season - who is expected to slot in at free safety to replace Josh Proctor.

"I think when you look at safeties, it's how fast can guys react? There's two ways you do that - one is mentally. You see how sharp (Downs) is, the way he can answer questions, articulate them, and he's really special from a mental standpoint, and then how fast you can react physically. If you watch him in agility drills, his body, the functional movement skills, are tremendous of him.

"If you have a guy that can respond quickly from a mental and a physical standpoint, I think you're a

step up on guys from that standpoint. Not only does he have great physical tools, but he can use those in a really efficient way.”

One player potentially left in positional limbo is Sonny Styles, who lined up at safety last season but could see a move to linebacker this year, but will undoubtedly be an important part of Ohio State’s defense.

“He is a dynamic playmaker,” Guerrieri said. “You have seen that on Saturdays here. ... He’s dynamic in what he can do. He’s a unique combination of being able to run, cover, tackle, mentality, size - he has a lot of things and attributes there. Without getting into specifics, we will take a look at a number of different things for him and put him in the best position for him to be successful and the team to be successful.”

But those types of questions will be reserved for defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and head coach Ryan Day. And regardless of whether or not Styles ends up in the room, rest assured that Guerrieri will have no shortage of talent at his disposal.

“(Knowles) will get into the specifics of schematics and things like that from there,” Guerrieri said, “but I’m really excited about the playmaking ability of a number of guys on the defense.”