

Observations As Ohio State Opens Spring Practice



Ohio State opened up spring practice on Tuesday, the first of 15 practices that will culminate in the Buckeyes' annual spring game on April 15. Here are a handful of observations on both sides of the ball from the 30-minute viewing period offered to the media:

Offense

Ohio State's quarterbacks got a good workout during the media's viewing period, running several drills with various routes to the wideouts and running backs. Kyle McCord went first, followed by Devin Brown - now wearing No. 33 - Tristan Gebbia (wearing No. 14 in practice but listed as No. 15 on Ohio State's spring roster) and walk-ons Mason Maggs and Chad Ray.

Running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Evan Pryor are out for the spring while rehabbing injuries, and with their absence, Ohio State ran drills in the order of Miyan Williams, Chip Trayanum and Dallan Hayden, followed by walk-ons Will Hartson and Chase Brecht.

The Buckeyes did not have a full complement at wide receiver with Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming out for the spring, but Marvin Harrison Jr. was a full participant, and we also received a first look at some of the freshmen wideouts in Bryson Rodgers (No. 86), Noah Rogers (No. 80) and Carnell Tate (No. 17).

Also taking the field were sophomores Kojo Antwi, Kaleb Brown, Caleb Burton and Kyion Grayes, as well as Jayden Ballard and Xavier Johnson, who is set to begin his sixth season with the Buckeyes.

While there was little of note from the tight ends in terms of a potential rotation, what did stand out was the stature of freshman Jelani Thurman. The first-year tight end looks every bit of his listing on the roster at 6-6, 253 pounds, and his physicality could set him up to see the field early in Columbus.

The offensive line did not run any drills that laid out an explicit depth chart, though Josh Fryar did appear to take reps at left tackle, with Zen Michalski and Tegra Tshabola both working at right tackle. Transfer offensive lineman Victor Cutler Jr. did his work at center, with Donovan Jackson and Matthews Jones lining up at their respective guard positions.

And while Jakob James was previously listed as out for the spring by head coach Ryan Day, James did take reps during Tuesday's viewing session, indicating that he may be available this spring for Ohio State.

Defense

The Buckeyes entered the spring without two difference makers in linebacker Tommy Eichenberg and safety Kourt Williams — who will miss camp due to injury recovery. While Eichenberg and Williams did not participate in drills, they were both present at camp and went through pre-practice warm-ups. In early February, head coach Ryan Day said linebacker Mitchell Melton would miss camp alongside Eichenberg and Williams, but Melton went through warm-ups and competed in the four drills observed by media.

Although the Buckeyes were missing a pair of returners, transfer defensive backs Ja'Had Carter and Davison Igbinosun made their first appearances in the scarlet and gray on Tuesday. Carter — a safety who spent the past three seasons at Syracuse — and Igbinosun — a sophomore cornerback from Ole Miss — each practiced at their natural positions, while Igbinosun worked behind cornerbacks Denzel Burke and Jordan Hancock in drills. Igbinosun possesses solid length at cornerback, boasting a 6-2, 187-pound frame, while slotting in alongside Jyaire Brown during drills.

While the transfers were accounted for, as were the incoming freshmen. Safety Malik Hartford won one of the 10-yard burst sprints against his teammates during pre-practice warm-up, while cornerback Jermaine Mathews worked in with the third group of corners — behind Burke, Hancock, Brown, and Igbinosun. Will Smith Jr. was also in attendance, working in with Ohio State's defensive tackle rotation during the drills observed by media.

Staying with the defensive line, Larry Johnson's group appears to already have a pecking order in place with several returners in line to reclaim their spots. Jack Sawyer remained at the Jack — the hybrid defensive end/linebacker position in defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' defense — while Tyliek Williams settled into the three-technique, Mike Hall manned the nose tackle and J.T. Tuimoloau lined up opposite of Sawyer as the first group in drills. Speaking of the Jack, second-year defensive end Caden Curry and Melton worked in behind Sawyer at the position during drills.

There was also a glimpse of a pecking order at the linebacker position. With Eichenberg sidelined, Cody Simon lined up alongside Steele Chambers during drills, with C.J. Hicks working in behind the duo. Simon served as the first substitution at the position last season, and early indications prove that he may do so again.

Special Teams

As expected, Jesse Mirco punted with the first team. Jake Seibert followed Mirco in the rotation, evidently the backup now after former Ohio State punter Michael O'Shaughnessy transferred to Michigan State this offseason.

As for the returners, Marvin Harrison Jr., Kaleb Brown, Carnell Tate and Reis Stocksdale were back deep on punts. Even though Harrison took first-team reps, Egbuka - who handled punts for Ohio State last season - will likely return to that spot once he is back and healthy.