

Fall Camp Observations From The Defense: Starters All But Solidified In Year Two Of Jim Knowles' System



When Ohio State kicked off fall camp on Thursday at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, Buckeye Sports Bulletin was also able to take note of the defense as they enter year two under defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. Here is what we saw from the defensive side of the ball throughout the two-hour practice:

The Buckeyes still have many looming questions at offensive positions such as quarterback and right tackle, but the state of the defensive line seems to be intact. Returning defensive tackles J.T. Tuimoloau, Michael Hall Jr. and Ty Hamilton once again assumed first-team roles throughout practice, while defensive end Jack Sawyer also took the majority of the starting reps.

Defensive lineman Tyliek Williams suffered what seemed to be a right knee injury early on during Thursday's practice, and after being tended to by trainers, Williams was limited for the rest of the day, and transfer Tywone Malone took over his snaps, including a few alongside the first team. As for the initial rotation, this comes of no surprise, as both head coach Ryan Day and Knowles have made it clear that they will heavily rely on this starting front-four to rush the quarterback throughout the season.

Similarly to the defensive line, the linebacker position also seemed solidified, with Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers assuming first-team snaps. Sophomore C.J. Hicks, who many view as a fit to assume the Jack position this year, took reps with the second-team defense, and Knowles lauded Hicks' versatility after practice, saying that he could see Hicks man the Jack and Will linebacker positions. While he was not a participant in practice, Ohio State did see the debut of transfer linebacker Nigel Glover, who will wear No. 37 for the Buckeyes after transferring to the team earlier this week.

In the secondary, Knowles used his deep cornerback room to his advantage, rotating his top-four corners - Denzel Burke, Jordan Hancock, Jyaire Brown and Davison Igbinosum - across the two fields throughout the day. Sporting his brand new No. 1 uniform for the first time this season, Igbinosum was thrown into the fire in his first fall practice with the program, as he found himself lined up against Marvin Harrison Jr. on many occasions. Despite the difficult matchup, the Ole Miss transfer showed some promise throughout the day, using his unique length and speed to disrupt some routes during drills.

At the safety position, Knowles experimented with many different lineups, but mostly had Syracuse transfer Ja'Had Carter, Lathan Ransom and Sonny Styles taking first-team reps. Josh Proctor, who started games for the Buckeyes last season, lined up with the second team for the majority of the practice, while Kye Stokes and Ryan Turner joined Proctor with Cameron Martinez limited.

Despite the many moving pieces in the secondary on Thursday, Knowles offered a clear picture of how he wants the safety and cornerback positions to shape out this season after practice. Knowles said he expects Burke and Hancock to assume the starting cornerback roles, while Carter will start as the adjuster/free safety, Ransom will man the bandit/strong safety role, and Styles will play nickel.