

Ohio State Assistants Kerry Coombs, Larry Johnson Discuss Challenges Of Unusual Offseason



Seven Ohio State assistant coaches were made available to the media via teleconference on Wednesday morning, with defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs and defensive line coach Larry Johnson first answering questions about the challenges of coaching amid the coronavirus outbreak and their respective position groups.

The following is bullet-point recap of what they had to say:

Kerry Coombs

- Coombs said he expects cornerbacks Sevyn Banks and Tyreke Johnson and safety Marcus Hooker to play significant roles in the secondary this season.
- Coombs said Banks was everything he wanted in a cornerback when he recruited him out of Orlando (Fla.) Jones in the 2018 cycle. Added Banks has shown tremendous growth in the last two years and “competed really well” in the three spring practices the Buckeyes were able to conduct.
- Coombs said he isn’t making any major changes to the Ohio State defense that was ranked No. 1 in the nation last year. “We aren’t making an overhaul on anything.” Noted there will be some small changes, however.
- Coombs said it’s difficult to install new plays and concepts in virtual meetings. “I think it would be foolish to try and teach new concepts and ideas through a computer screen.” Added it’s challenging to do anywhere but on the field.
- Coombs said he’s “absolutely climbing the walls” given the current stay-at-home orders, but added it gives him a lot of time to recruit and watch tape. “So that’s fun.” Mentioned he bought a ping-pong table on Tuesday. “We’ve got to compete somehow. We’ve got to find something to do.”
- Coombs said head coach Ryan Day has shown a tremendous amount of leadership and patience during this time.
- Coombs praised former cornerback Damon Arnette for his toughness and work ethic. “Don’t be surprised how high he gets drafted.”
- Coombs expects cornerback Tyreke Johnson to play on the outside rather than inside as a slot.
- Coombs said linebacker Peter Werner has tremendous versatility. “I think he has the athletic skillset to be able to play virtually anywhere on the field. I’m excited to continue to watch him

grow and develop here.”

- Coombs said he only wants to recruit players who are good enough and want to make it to the NFL. Added Ohio State players should have lofty goals and desire to maintain the standard that has been set.
- Coombs believes Ohio State’s defensive back recruiting is going “fantastic” so far. Said they are finding the right kids, not just because of their physical talents and abilities. Notes they’re all very versatile, though.
- Coombs said he still communicates with all of his former players in the NFL. “Those are like my sons.” Mentions how proud he is of Arnette and Jeff Okudah, who is expected to be the first cornerback taken in Thursday’s draft.
- Asked how Day recruits so well, Coombs said he has a plan called the “Circle of Care,” where they show the family they truly have their son’s best interest. “I really have never seen anything like it.”

Larry Johnson

- Johnson said defensive tackles Taron Vincent, Haskell Garrett, Jerron Cage and Antwan Jackson all need to step up their play this fall. Added it’s great to have so many defensive ends back to help offset the losses in the middle.
- Johnson said he’s “really pleased” with the leadership shown by fifth-year senior Jonathon Cooper.
- Johnson like what he saw in three practices from Vincent, who missed all of last season with a torn labrum. “You start to see the things you recruited him for.” Added Vincent could fit really well into the three-technique position.
- Johnson said Ohio State’s record of developing NFL players is important to recruits, but added their mothers don’t really care about their son making it to the NFL. They want them to get a degree first and foremost. “We have a lot to sell here at the Ohio State University.”
- Johnson on Cooper: “If you look up the word ‘warrior,’ you’re gonna see his name right next to it.” Said it was tough to see him deal with an ankle injury last season, but is thrilled to have him back for another season. “The minute he told me he was coming back, you talk about the happiest coach in the world.”
- Johnson believes sophomore Zach Harrison could play a big role on defense this season. “He has an incredible work ethic. I think the sky is the limit for Zach.”
- Johnson said the team’s Zoom meetings have been really productive in building camaraderie within the unit while they’re away from campus and the facility. Added he has great dialogue and open conversations with the players.
- Johnson on former defensive end Chase Young, who is expected to be the second-overall pick in the upcoming draft: “You almost expect him to leave in three years.”

Updates from running backs coach Tony Alford, wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson, offensive line coach Greg Studrawa and linebackers coach Al Washington will soon follow.

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