

Ohio State Confident In Cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. To Step In If Needed Against Penn State



Ohio State could potentially be without one of the team's top defensive players against Penn State, as cornerback Denzel Burke's status remains up in the air for Saturday's noon kickoff at Ohio Stadium, but the Buckeyes are not worried about who might step up in Burke's place.

When Burke exited the game at Purdue last week, it was freshman cornerback Jermaine Mathews Jr. who took the field, and he played admirably in limited action to continue as is becoming an impressive first year for the defensive back.

"You saw him play last week and he's done a nice job when he's stepped in there," head coach Ryan Day said Wednesday. "You know, he's certainly aggressive and he's somebody who doesn't shy away from competition. He's very competitive.

"If need be, he's somebody that we have confidence putting in the game. We see it in practice. He goes against really good receivers every day in practice, and he's shown that he can cover our guys. That in and of itself should give him enough confidence to say, 'I can go play in a game,' and certainly the coaches believe that he can do it."

Mathews has already burnt his redshirt, appearing in five of Ohio State's six games this season, and has played the most snaps at cornerback outside of Burke, Davison Igbinosun and Jordan Hancock. He came on the scene against Western Kentucky in just the third game of his career, when he corralled an interception in the fourth quarter and returned it 58 yards for a touchdown.

Should Burke not be able to play against Penn State, it would be the most significant challenge yet for Mathews, but his teammates have confidence that he can step in and provide a boost for Ohio State's secondary.

"He works really hard," Hancock said. "He's a student of the game. He's really fast, athletic, and he's

really twitchy and can cover routes. We've got all the confidence in him because he's a dog, so he goes out there, we know he's going to do his job. We have all the trust in him."