

Ohio State Defensive End J.T. Tuimoloau Returning For Senior Season



Ohio State defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau announced Friday that he will be returning for his senior season, providing a significant boost for the Buckeyes heading into 2024.

Tuimoloau, a native of Edgewood, Wa., entered the program in 2021 as one of Ohio State's more highly-touted defensive prospects in recent memory. The Sammamish (Wa.) Eastside Catholic product was rated as the nation's fourth-best prospect and second-best defensive lineman.

Tuimoloau was able to find some considerable playing time his freshman year in 2021, appearing in each of Ohio State's 13 games and totaling 17 tackles (4.5 for loss) and tying for fourth on the team with 2.5 sacks. But it wasn't until his sophomore season that he began to assert his dominance on Larry Johnson's defensive line.

Starting all 13 games in 2022, he experienced a breakout season with the Buckeyes, finishing with 28 tackles (10.5 for loss), 3.5 sacks, two interceptions and four pass breakups along with a team-high six quarterback hurries and three forced fumbles, helping him earn first-team All-Big Ten honors.

Tuimoloau biggest outing to date was in Ohio State's road win over Penn State that season, where he helped the Buckeyes to a 44-31 win by forcing four takeaways that resulted in 21 Ohio State points, including a strip sack and 14-yard pick-six in the fourth quarter that helped extend the Buckeyes' lead to 41-24. He finished the day with a career-high six tackles (three for loss), two sacks, two interceptions, one pass deflections, one forced fumble and a fumble recovery.

"To intercept balls like that as a defensive end and then get a defensive score, I don't know if I've ever seen that before," head coach Ryan Day said after the Penn State game. "That's big time."

Tuimoloau didn't have a dominant outing like he did against the Nittany Lions this season, but he still managed to excel on a much-improved Ohio State defense. The junior served as one of Ohio State's pass-rushing leaders all season, totaling 38 tackles (seven tackles for loss), a team-high six quarterback hurries, five sacks, two pass breakups and a fumble recovery, and enters 2024 with 74 career tackles

(18 for loss), nine pass breakups, seven sacks, two picks, two fumble recoveries and a forced fumble.

According to NFLMockDraftDatabase.com, he was projected to be a second round selection this year, with his best player ranking coming in at No. 21, though Tuimoloau will now hope to boost his stock with another year with the Buckeyes.

Tuimoloau joins a growing list of junior Buckeyes set to return for their senior seasons, including defensive linemen Jack Sawyer, Tyleik Williams and Ty Hamilton, cornerbacks Denzel Burke and Jordan Hancock, offensive lineman Donovan Jackson and wide receiver Emeka Egbuka. Sawyer and Tuimoloau figure to retain their starting jobs next season while the Buckeyes will also return Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson Jr., among others.