

Ohio State Football Outlook: The Defensive Depth Chart



With the Buckeyes' spring game in the rear-view mirror, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and his staff will enter the summer with a barebones outline for their roster's depth chart in 2022.

Because the program doesn't release an official depth chart, Buckeye Sports Bulletin compiled observations and resources to build its first version of the Ohio State starting offensive, defensive and special teams players. We will also address the second-string and third-string Buckeyes at each position.

Consider this article as you would an NFL mock draft. Ohio State's depth chart will undoubtedly change between May and August. Injuries, the transfer portal, and other factors will cause roster movement. For now, here's BSB's first version of the 2022 depth chart projection based on what we've seen and heard around the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and Ohio Stadium this spring.

DEFENSIVE LINE

Ohio State's two starting defensive ends could be upperclassmen, underclassmen or both.

The upperclassmen? Zach Harrison, Taron Vincent, Jerron Cage and Javontae Jean-Baptiste.

The underclassmen? J.T. Tuimoloau, Tyleik Williams, Mike Hall and Jack Sawyer

The mix (and the most likely outcome)? Tuimoloau, Vincent, Cage and Harrison

Others Available: Tyleik Williams, Mike Hall, Tyler Friday, Caden Curry, Omari Abor and Kenyatta Jackson Jr.

First-year defensive coordinator Jim Knowles didn't answer all of our questions this spring. He claimed his scheme remained "vanilla" through the first weeks of practice and used that time for talent evaluations and building solid relationships with his players. He will install more formations and plays with time, and there might be growing pains for this unit. Still, his momentum should carry through the summer and provide the Buckeyes with a much-needed boost on defense before the 2023 season starts.

LINEBACKERS

Starters: Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers

Backups: Teradja Mitchell and Chip Trayanum

Others Available: Cody Simon, C.J. Hicks, Palaie Gaoteote, Reid Carrico and Gabe Powers

For the Jim Knowles defense to include three safeties it must take away one linebacker, leaving the Buckeyes with only two spots for nine scholarship players. This season, Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers will play a significant role as starters or role players, and right now we have them as the frontrunners for the starting jobs.

Behind Eichenberg and Chambers will come a similar combination of athleticism and talent in Teradja Mitchell and Chip Trayanum. However, there likely won't be clear-cut backups in the linebacker room this season. Instead, the Buckeyes will lean toward a rotation behind their starters, looking to add depth with Cody Simon, C.J. Hicks and Palaie Gaoteote when applicable. Reid Carrico will still look to develop in his second season, while Gabe Powers will likely be a special teams player in his first year on campus.

CORNERBACKS

Starters: Denzel Burke and Cameron Brown

Backups: Jordan Hancock and J.K. Johnson

Others Available: Jyaire Brown and Ryan Turner

There aren't many questions for who will start at cornerback for Ohio State this fall. The Buckeyes return both starters from last season in rising sophomore Denzel Burke and fifth-year senior Cameron Brown, which should instill confidence in the coaching staff.

Burke was CB1 as a true freshman and Brown settled in after overcoming his early-season injuries. Ohio State had depth at the position, but Ryan Watts and Lejond Cavazos transferred in the offseason, leaving the Buckeyes with six scholarship players on the roster.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles told the media that they've been impressed with Jordan Hancock and J.K. Johnson. While Hancock and Johnson might have fallen behind Burke as standouts in the class of 2021, the coaches assured Buckeye fans that the sophomores will make a significant impact for the Buckeyes this season.

SAFETIES

Starters: Ronnie Hickman, Josh Proctor and Tanner McCallister

Backups: Kourt Williams, Kye Stokes, Cam Martinez

Others Available: Lathan Ransom, Jantzen Dunn, Jaylen Johnson and Sonny Styles

The safety positions will likely be the most interesting to break down in defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' new scheme. With three on the field at all times, there should be plenty of opportunities for the Buckeyes to keep players fresh and engaged in the backend.

Currently, Hickman, Proctor and McCallister feel like the frontrunners for the top three spots in the rotation. However, that won't keep players like Williams, Stokes and Martinez off the field in most games. With Notre Dame around the corner and a string of non-conference games including Arkansas State and Toledo, the Ohio State coaches will have several chances to see which players best fit the mold in Knowles' first season.