

# Ohio State Football Outlook: The Safety 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 — and the following articles until May 16 — 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.

## 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 opportunity 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 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.

## **RONNIE HICKMAN**

**HEIGHT:** 6-1

**WEIGHT:** 205

**HOMETOWN:** SOUTH ORANGE, N.J.

**RECRUITING:** FOUR-STAR FROM DEPAUL CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

After starting on Ohio State's defense for the first time last season, Hickman will look to build on a successful year in Knowles' new defense. He is expected to play at the "adjuster" position, which is essentially a free safety, and said during spring ball that he is equipped to do everything from reading the quarterback to making plays on the ball to covering space.

This puts greater responsibility on Hickman as one of the leaders of the defense, but his name has been brought up whenever Knowles has been asked about standouts since he arrived at Ohio State, indicating that the staff feels he is ready to bear the additional load for the Buckeyes' reworked defense.

## **JOSH PROCTOR**

**HEIGHT:** 6-2

**WEIGHT:** 205

**HOMETOWN:** OWASSO, OKLA.

**RECRUITING:** FOUR-STAR FROM OWASSO HIGH SCHOOL

Assuming Proctor remains healthy, he will be a starting safety in the fall. His compound fracture is healing correctly, and he worked his way into spring practices toward the end of the two-week period. Look for Proctor to man the bandit/strong safety role next to Hickman. That position will allow him to roam free and hit hard — something he's always done for the Buckeyes.

Proctor and Hickman will be versatile enough that Day and Knowles can get creative with formations and blitz packages. Either player can be a weapon near the line of scrimmage, especially Proctor, whose physicality is a well-known factor to opposing coaching staffs.

## **TANNER MCCALLISTER**

**HEIGHT:** 5-11

**WEIGHT:** 192

**HOMETOWN:** ROCKWALL, TEXAS

**RECRUITING:** THREE-STAR FROM ROCKWALL-HEATH AND OKLAHOMA STATE TRANSFER

McCallister has the athleticism and skill to be more than a player-coach for the Buckeyes. Yes, his maturity and wisdom stand out among other players, but those qualities come from an abundance of

talent that Knowles maximized at Oklahoma State.

In Columbus, McCallister will be a solid nickel cornerback — a position where he performed tremendously last season for the Pokes. McCallister's grasp of the safety position allows him to flow between the deep third and the slot, revealing his unique versatility that should bring comfort to the Ohio State coaching staff.

### **KOURT WILLIAMS**

**HEIGHT:** 6-1

**WEIGHT:** 220

**HOMETOWN:** HAVOR CITY, CALIF.

**RECRUITING:** FOUR-STAR FROM ST. JOHN BOSCO HIGH SCHOOL

Williams feels fit for the bandit role this fall. He had one of the best form tackles of 2021 in Ohio State's game against Purdue. Williams flew down the opposing sideline before wrapping up a Boilermaker ball carrier and driving his legs and body toward the ground. That kind of technique stands out to Day and Knowles, who will hope Williams only continues in that department in 2022.

He passes all the boxes as a downhill run stopper. However, Williams still needs significant development in pass coverage. Knowing this, the BSB Podcast theorized a potential move to linebacker for the redshirt sophomore but that doesn't seem to be in the cards at this time.

Williams will likely be in the mix for the bandit position with Proctor, and he'll get most of his usage against heavy run teams until he becomes reliable guarding opposing pass catchers and occupying zones.

### **KYE STOKES**

**HEIGHT:** 6-2

**WEIGHT:** 185

**HOMETOWN:** SEFFNER, FLA.

**RECRUITING:** FOUR-STAR FROM ARMWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

Stokes was the first early enrollee to lose his black stripe, indicating that the Ohio State coaching staff loves his attitude and work ethic as much as his talent. His spring game performance opened an opportunity for playing time as a true freshman — similar to what Denzel Burke accomplished last season.

Burke faced relatively little resistance for the starting job in 2021. On the other hand, Stokes will contend with Hickman, Proctor, McCallister, Williams, Martinez and others for playing time. His future in an Ohio State uniform will undoubtedly be bright, but it might take another year to see that light shine on a week-to-week basis.

## **OTHERS AVAILABLE**

*Cameron Martinez, Lathan Ransom, Jantzen Dunn, Jaylen Johnson and Sonny Styles*

If you look strictly at numbers, Ohio State will have significant depth at safety next season. However, the Buckeyes have several players at the position returning from injuries, including Proctor, Ransom, Dunn and Johnson. That fact leaves the door open for players like Williams, Stokes, Martinez and Styles to compete for rotational snaps.