

# Ohio State Linebackers Coach James Laurinaitis Excited For First Season In Full Time Role



Ohio State's new linebackers coach James Laurinaitis needed just one year with the Buckeyes as a graduate assistant to earn a promotion to a full-time role, but he does feel like he grew a lot in that year as a coach.

"Teaching progression is one thing, and now thankfully being in the same scheme for two years in a row will be very beneficial," he said. "Year one at Notre Dame, (I was) learning how to teach it. You forget what college players don't know. Then coming here, a lot of it was trying to learn not only (defensive coordinator Jim Knowles') scheme, but how he wanted it to be coached. Now understanding the scheme, you can dive deeper."

Now that he is what he would have called when he was a graduate assistant, a "real coach," he has his own office, and is embracing the responsibility that comes with the linebacker room being his. He said even though he was basically doing the job last season, there's a difference between coaching the linebackers and being the linebackers coach.

With both Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers leaving for the NFL, he will need to fill those spots. He hopes there will be four or five players who earn their way into playing time, especially because it could be a much longer season than college players are used to.

"The vision that I have for our room is hopefully we come out of this spring with at least four guys who have earned the right to play," he said. "That's my hope. I don't know if that will happen... The season is going to be really long with the 12-team playoff. We're going to have to rotate. If only two guys show up and prove they're trustworthy, then two will play."

He named Cody Simon as someone who will likely see a lot of time on the field, and said he wishes he would have played him more during the 2023 season. Laurinaitis said C.J. Hicks and Gabe Powers both are going to need to get some time on the field and show that they can be consistent, which he believes they can be with their talent. He said he believes Hicks is going to have a big spring.

"Consistency breeds confidence," he said. "If you want to put your stake on a position, you have to do it day in and day out.

"C.J. has all the potential in the world, and I think sometimes he just has to cut it loose and go play. With the way he's attacked the offseason workouts, and the way he's carried himself, I expect him to take a jump."

There has been speculation about whether Sonny Styles could be moving to linebacker with the secondary being so crowded, and his size and versatility to play on different places on the defense. Laurinaitis said that's a question that's above him, but he is hoping to have Styles join his group.

"I think every coach on our defensive staff would lobby for Sonny to come into their room," he said. "Sonny has such a rare skill set. He would play kind of the overhang last year where you didn't really know what he was. Is this a safety or more of an outside backer? He's just so versatile."

He said he enjoys helping younger players try to live out their dreams like he was able to in the NFL, but more than that wants to be able to build good relationships with his players like he was able to as a player with Jim Tressel, Luke Fickell and Steve Spagnuolo.

"They were all great developers of men, and probably the three most impactful men in my life outside of my father," he said. "The fact that I could hopefully be that to someone else is what gets me up every morning."