

# Ohio State Linebackers Coach James Laurinaitis Reflects On Time With Former Teammate Marcus Freeman At Media Day



Last Saturday, Notre Dame head coach Marcus Freeman offered little when asked about his relationship with former OSU linebacker mate James Laurinaitis, joking that while he considers the current Ohio State linebackers coach a dear friend, the two have stories that probably shouldn't be shared in a press conference setting.

One week later at Ohio State's pre-national championship media day, Laurinaitis also joked around while talking about his former teammate, saying that the only reason they became friends was because Freeman — a known wrestling fanatic — idolized Laurinaitis' father, WWE Hall of Famer Joe Laurinaitis, also known as "Road Warrior Animal."

"As (my freshman season) goes on, we really find out that Marcus is a die-hard wrestling fan," Laurinaitis said. "That's the only reason he befriended me, was because of my dad. I'm serious."

Beyond the jokes, though, Laurinaitis also opened up a bit when asked about what Freeman means to him, as well as what this title game matchup means to them both. Laurinaitis, who played alongside Freeman at Ohio State from 2006-08, said that it will be a special moment for him to square off against an old friend in the national championship game on Monday night, and he is proud of the success Freeman has had with the Fighting Irish.

"We talked earlier in the week, and it's a cool experience when you get to go against your friend and do all that," Laurinaitis said. "But ultimately, at the end of the day, this is about Ohio State and Notre Dame. It's certainly not about us. But from the human side of it, I'm proud of him and everything he's done to lead that program... I'm looking forward to seeing him on the field."

Laurinaitis is not too far removed from being around Freeman and the Fighting Irish, as his first coaching gig was with Notre Dame in 2022 when Freeman hired him as a graduate assistant. The former Buckeye said he learned a lot about the art of coaching in his one year around Freeman, where he figured out how to use his football knowledge into a teaching moment for young college players.

"(I learned) everything," Laurinaitis said. "I had to learn how to teach. How do I want to present this

information? I felt like I knew so much football, but how do I break it down from day one — ‘Hey, here is where I want your feet to be when you’re tackling.’ So that was challenging. But thankfully I had some great guys to learn from.

“I learned from Marcus, took some of his stuff. Learned from (Notre Dame defensive coordinator) Al Golden, took some of his stuff. And then thought back to drills that I did while I was playing under Luke Fickell and Steve Spagnolo, and I just tried to combine everything that I thought worked.”

While Laurinaitis said he learned a lot from Freeman in their one year together, most of their time together in football came with the Scarlet and Gray. When asked to reflect on their time together on the field, Laurinaitis was quick to commend him for the selflessness and leadership he showed him, especially early on in their playing careers.

He said the older Freeman taught him how to play linebacker at an elite level even while he was injured for the season during Laurinaitis’ freshman season in 2005.

“During that time (of Freeman’s knee injury), he really helped me learn the position,” Laurinaitis. “He could’ve taken a negative mindset from it all, but instead, he was locked into helping a younger player out.”