

Ohio State Looking For Ways To Get “Versatile” Sonny Styles On The Field



When then-freshman safety Sonny Styles was put on the field in Ohio State’s College Football Playoff semifinal against Georgia last season, playing a season-high 12 defensive snaps, it was clear at that point that the Buckeyes had big plans for Styles, likely sooner rather than later.

That manifested in the spring, as Styles clearly established himself in the two-deep by taking snaps behind senior safety Lathan Ransom at bandit, and even subbing in on occasion at nickel along with Cameron Martinez. Now, as Ohio State moves into the summer, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles could see Styles appearing in all three safety spots for the Buckeyes as his development continues, with the potential to add duties at free safety.

“He will (compete at free and strong safety), because we’ll need it. He’s repped at all three,” Knowles said on Tuesday. “We like him in that nickel position, but of course when he’s in there, it’s almost like a strong safety. You adapt what he does best to the defense and what I call when he’s in there, if he’s in at a nickel.

“We tried to put him in some challenging positions just to see how he would hold up with a lot of the things that a nickel has to do, and he did well,” Knowles continued. “The sky’s the limit with Sonny and we’ll keep working and I’ll keep working over the summer to really define the things that he does best.”

Styles played in several spots last season at the staff attempted to parse out the best role for the freshman, who reclassified from the 2023 recruiting class and joined Ohio State as he should have been preparing for his senior year of high school. According to Pro Football Focus, he lined up near the line of scrimmage on 33 plays and repped in the secondary on 35 other snaps.

“I think it takes all spring to really put him in those positions where he’s going to be challenged cover-wise and in some matchups, and he did well,” Knowles said. “I think he’s a real versatile player. He’s shown me a lot since he’s been here, but he’s ready to play.”

Styles has taken snaps at all three safety positions this spring, displaying that versatility enjoyed by the staff, but Ransom has likely locked down a role at boundary safety while Martinez and transfer Ja’Had Carter – who safeties coach Perry Eliano said Tuesday is back to 100 percent after suffering an injury in

the spring - are likely to compete at nickel.

This leaves free safety as the most realistic position for Styles if the staff wants to get him on the field and keep him on the field this season, continuing the competition between him and sixth-year safety Josh Proctor to determine the final starting safety for the Buckeyes.

"He's more adept at playing in a high safety position than you would think for a bigger guy," Knowles said. "Most of the time last year, we had him at the line of scrimmage or close to the line of scrimmage. We've come up with a dual plan for him where he'll be able to compete at a high safety position, because I think we're going to need him there, but he'll have a package where certainly he's down close to the line of scrimmage and able to blitz and do some things in the run game and pass game for us."

Regardless of where he lines up - whether at free safety, on the boundary, at nickel or even in the box - Styles is not a player that Ohio State is interested in leaving off the field entering his sophomore season.

"We're going to find ways to get everybody on the field that's going to help us win championships, and Sonny's part of that matrix," Eliano said. "I think everybody's got to understand, he's 18 years old. He reclassified, but Sonny has worked. He's played on the biggest of stages to his young career and did well, so we're going to find ways to get guys on the field, guys that are playmakers, guys that have earned it each and every day, whether it be the spring, summer, and going into the fall."