

Ohio State Will Experiment With Moving Sonny Styles To Linebacker



When safety Caleb Downs committed to Ohio State from the transfer portal, the secondary became even more crowded than it already was with so many returning starters and more talented players coming in.

Lathan Ransom, Josh Proctor and Sonny Styles got the most time at the safety position during the 2023 season, and Proctor exhausting his eligibility opened a spot which gave the Buckeyes some options. But as a freshman All-American, Downs is likely to slot in somewhere in the secondary with the talent he brings to the table, so some players will need to be shuffled around.

Head coach Ryan Day said they are already looking at possibly moving Styles to linebacker permanently, a position that might make sense for him because of his size and ability to tackle.

“We’ve had conversations with Sonny and he has the flexibility to do a lot of different things, which is great,” Day said Feb. 7. “As we get into spring, we’ll start to figure out how those will all shake out. He has the flexibility to do multiple things not only because of his skill set in terms of his size, but also his mental makeup. He’s really willing to embrace some of those different roles.”

As much has been said about Styles by defensive coordinator Jim Knowles throughout his time at Ohio State as well. There were times last year when the sophomore moved inside the box as the nickel or a safety to blitz, so he would be moving to a position which he has shown he has the skillset for if he ends up at linebacker for the upcoming season.

Last year in the slot, Styles already provided a lot of value by being able to involve himself in the run game if it was needed, making it so the defense would have a tougher time to identify the defense the Buckeyes were in.

“He has the ability to play high safety, to play man coverage, but he also has the length and the toughness to play up close to the ball,” Knowles said before the 2023 season. “So we play him in that nickel/strike position, and now you have a lot more flexibility in terms of, ‘Is he man on the slot? Is he in zone? Is he outside, inside? Is he blitzing off the edge?’ He just creates a whole other dynamic.”

With Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers both gone, there is another spot to fill, assuming Cody

Simon slots into the Mike linebacker position since he did so while Eichenberg was out late in the season with his arm injury.

Whether he does move to linebacker or not, Styles will likely have a big impact on the 2024 defense that is shaping up to be one of the best in the nation for the second straight year.