

Pantoni Breaks Down Transfer Portal Strategy



Since the transfer portal and one-time free transfer rule both were implemented in college football, Ohio State has taken a measured approach to transfer portal recruiting.

Players are seldom taken that can't serve an immediate purpose for the program. Ohio State pulled an immediate starter at quarterback and offensive guard who both started in 2019 in Justin Fields and Jonah Jackson, Trey Sermon who became the starter at running back in 2020 and Tanner McCalister to play nickel safety in 2022.

"There's a lot of vetting going on," general manager for player personnel Mark Pantoni said Feb. 1. "We want to make sure, most importantly, that they're a great fit because we feel like we have a great culture and great players here. So we want to make sure it's all going to mesh well. We don't want to bring someone in that's going to cause a disruption."

Even some of the depth options had clearly defined roles. Gunnar Hoak and Chris Chugunov were both previous transfers at quarterback brought in specifically to serve as backups.

With 2023 on the horizon, Ohio State's approach hasn't changed, but some important positions that could use upgrades are being evaluated.

"The guys we've hit on in the past have been home runs and hopefully we continue to hit on those," Pantoni said.

Thus far the Buckeyes have made three additions from the portal, two that will partake in spring practice and one that will arrive during the next transfer window from May 1 to May 15. Former UL-Monroe offensive tackle Victor Cutler will be moved inside and factor into the battle to be the next starting center at OSU, former Syracuse safety Ja'Had Carter was brought in to bolster defensive back depth and figures to start right away.

"Having Luke Wypler declare, we needed another guy, especially inside," head coach Ryan Day said. "So I'm looking forward to seeing what (Cutler) can do this spring."

"(Carter) has got his head down, and he's working," safeties coach Perry Eliano said. "He came here because he wanted to be developed to be the very best. He understands the task that's at hand. It's competition. And the old adage, iron sharpens iron. And so far, he's done a great job. He's just put his head down and worked."

They'll be joined in the fall by former Ole Miss cornerback Davison Igbinosun, a speedy 6-foot-2 coverman who broke up five passes for the Rebels in 2022.

The evaluation process for Pantoni's staff is an arduous one. As mentioned above, making sure players are the right fit is a top priority for the team.

"We have a full-time staff member, Billy Homer, (he's a) long-time NFL scout and came from the University of Florida," Pantoni said. "That's his full-time job, he's in charge of the portal. The months of December and January have been very hectic for him. He's done a great job for us to be ahead of the curve and doing a great job with his evaluations to find guys who might be a great fit."

Offensive tackle is still one area where Ohio State could look to add a player. It offered but did not land commitments from several during the first transfer portal window.

Still, the Buckeyes will continue to pick and choose the pieces they want to add from outside the program.

"We do want competition," Pantoni said. "We'll never (not) take a guy because we're scared that we may lose anybody here. But we do want to make sure it's going to be an upgrade. We don't want to just bring guys in to bring guys in, and the worst thing you can do is bring in a guy and they expect to start and that doesn't happen. Because that can ruin a locker room as well."