

Proctor Pleased To Make Impact Again For Buckeyes



For graduate safety Josh Proctor, the chances of the longtime Buckeye earning a starting role in Jim Knowles' secondary seemed slimmer with each passing fall camp practice. The sixth-year Proctor was seen working with the second-team defense in the beginning of August, as freshman Malik Hartford and Syracuse transfer Ja'Had Carter assumed the majority of the first-team reps at the free/adjuster safety position. Knowles even indicated after the first fall camp practice that he intended for Carter to be the starting adjuster.

The tide began to turn for Proctor towards the end of the month, however. On Aug. 29, Knowles changed tune, declaring an open competition at free safety between the presumed leader Carter, the young freshman Hartford and Proctor, leaving the door open for the veteran to take the job. Four days later, Proctor was back in a starting role for the Buckeyes, assuming the adjuster position to start the Buckeyes' season-opener against Indiana. This was a sudden shift in plans for Knowles and Ohio State, but Proctor said he was ready for the opportunity.

"I honestly wasn't sure. I just kind of prepared as starter this whole week, it's where my mindset has been this whole offseason. ... (I heard) probably during walkthroughs...It definitely was (cool to hear). It definitely was. I've been working towards it, so just glad to be back out here."

Despite the uncertainty of his role this season, Proctor said he stayed committed to his approach throughout the offseason and into fall camp, focusing less on his status on the team and more on improving and expanding his game.

"I just wanted to honestly keep my head down and work," Proctor said. "I didn't know if I was going to be a starter, but I wanted to work like a starter. It was work, watching film, meeting with coaches, staying in the playbook and all of that, so I just wanted to be prepared if I got the chance next time."

This paid dividends for the sixth-year Buckeye early in the team's season-opening win against the

Hoosiers. Proctor made the most of his minutes in the first quarter, where he set the edge in the run game and delivered a pair of blistering hits near the line of scrimmage. This was headlined by his key tackle for loss of Indiana running back Jaylin Lucas midway through the first period, where he quickly reacted to quarterback Brandon Sorsby's shovel pass to corral the 2022 All-American for a loss of three yards, resulting in an emphatic celebration from Proctor.

"The first hit is always what you look for, especially just getting back out there and just wanting to make plays," Proctor said. "So that first contact definitely got me going."

We figured that another option was coming, and I knew I had the pitch guy," he added. "I tried to beat the tight end to the side so I wouldn't get blocked out. It felt good. I had to make sure I got the tackle at first, but it definitely felt good.

Proctor's fast start to the season was spoiled in the second half, however, when he was replaced by freshman Malik Hartford in the third quarter, leading the four-star 2023 prospect to play the rest of the game at the adjuster. This wasn't the first time Proctor was forced to the sidelines in a season-opener, as he was relieved of his duties at strong safety in the Buckeyes' 21-10 victory over Notre Dame last season by Lathan Ransom.

Proctor's role in Jim Knowles' secondary is still unclear heading into Week 2, but the opportunity he was granted on Saturday to start the season for Ohio State is something he will not take for granted. For him, returning in a starting role was a result of the dedication and commitment he showed in the offseason.

"It means the world," Proctor said after the game. "That's all I wanted was a chance. All I needed was a chance to get out there. I know I can ball, I know what I can do, so when the chance came, I just wanted to take advantage of it.