

Ryan Day, Jim Knowles Looking For More From Pass Rush Against Maryland



After facing an offseason's worth of intense scrutiny and criticism, Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and his 4-2-5 unit have stepped up to the challenge, allowing just 8.5 points and 255.5 yards per game through the first four weeks of the season, with their only touchdown allowed being a 2-yard score from Western Kentucky's Malachi Corley. While this is a drastic change from the 2022 unit that relinquished a number of explosive plays towards the end of the season, the Buckeyes have still yet to unleash its full potential this season, as they have received little production out of their pass rush, generating just five sacks and an additional five quarterback hurries.

Although the unit showed signs of life against Notre Dame, headlined by junior defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau's heroics on the last defensive stop of the game, it remains a pressing concern among the program that will become an even larger area of importance for the team as they prepare to take on quarterback Taulia Tagovailoa and his high-flying Maryland offense on Saturday.

"We need to get pressure on him," head coach Ryan Day said. "Anytime you're trying to disrupt the passing game, that's a big part of the equation. He does a great job, and has done a great job. It's a big challenge to our defense to do that. It's a challenge to our defensive line."

According to defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, Tagovailoa will serve as a significant test to his defense due to his veteran-like poise and elite throwing talent. Through five games, the redshirt senior quarterback has completed 111 of his 169 passes (65.7 percent) of his passes for 1,464 yards and 13 touchdowns. These stats have allowed the Terrapins to possess the second-best scoring offense in the Big Ten, trailing only Michigan with 38.6 points per game.

"He's always been a dynamic player," Knowles said. "He creates offense, has a really strong arm. And he can make the throws from sideline to sideline. He hurt us with some plays last year. I just think he's a great player, but he's also making good decisions."

Knowles added that Tagovailoa's ability to escape the pocket and extend plays with his legs present an especially unique challenge to his defensive line that will test their discipline and togetherness as a unit. These traits have boded well for the Terrapins so far this season, as they have allowed its opponents to record just three sacks this season.

"You have to try and keep him off balance," Knowles said. "At the same time, it has to be a coordinated rush. Because you see multiple instances of guys coming free and he makes them miss. There's a lot of coordination involved in trying to contain him. That has to be a big part of the game plan."

While Knowles is emphasizing keeping Tagovailoa inside the pocket to limit his explosive ability, Day pointed to an aspect of Knowles' defense that has yet to have been unwrapped so far this season as a potential solution to containing the All-Big Ten signal caller. Day said it remains to be seen if, or when, Knowles will want to institute a more aggressive game plan that includes more blitz packages, but it is something they both would like to institute as the meat of their Big Ten schedule begins.

"Jim loves to blitz, and he will, Day said. "And he's always going to be aggressive. We're not going to be bend but don't break. But at the same time, when the front-four can affect the line of scrimmage and get a pass rush, then certainly it takes pressure off of the blitzing. But I know he has a whole bunch of blitzes lined up down the road for when the right time comes in. He has a great defensive mind, and finding that balance is critical