

Safeties Coach Matt Guerrieri Excited To Reunite With Jim Knowles, Emerge As Elite Recruiter At Ohio State



When Matt Guerrieri was named on Jan. 10 as the program's safeties coach for the 2024 season — replacing Perry Eliano in that role — it provided him with a unique opportunity to reconnect with the program that he spent one year with in 2022 as a senior advisor and analyst on defense. But, perhaps more importantly, it also gave him the chance to reunite with Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, who had built a strong relationship with Guerrieri and even called him a “little brother” after spending seven years together on defensive staffs, including a six-year stint together at Duke which dates back to 2012.

Speaking with the media for the first time since rejoining Knowles and the Buckeyes, Guerrieri said he is looking forward to returning to the longtime defensive coach's staff for the first time in two seasons, something that he feels will benefit him on both a personal and professional level.

“It's a great opportunity,” Guerrieri said. “Jim Knowles and I have been together from working camp at Duke in 2012. So that relationship is really strong. Whether we are working together or not, we talk a lot. So the opportunity to get back with him was getting back with family.”

“It's about real relationships in any business,” he added. “And to have a close one with him has definitely been awesome.”

As Guerrieri alluded to, the former Indiana defensive coordinator has great familiarity with Knowles and his system, having served under Knowles at Duke as both a graduate assistant (2012-2014) and safeties coach (2015-2017) before taking over his defense as co-defensive coordinator/safeties coach in 2018 when Knowles left Duke to become defensive coordinator at Oklahoma State. Guerrieri said this comfortability with Knowles and his unconventional defensive scheme will help him ease into his role and better understand the expectations he is tasked with meeting under his longtime colleague at Ohio State.

“I think it's efficiency first,” he said. “To be able to be on the same page. And then I think also knowing what it came from also helps too. If you know the history of something, then you can tweak the end

product in a way where (you can say), 'Hey, we've done this before,' or, 'ah, we dabbled with that before and it didn't really work,' that type of stuff. So I think to be able to have that history and experience with him will go a long way."

Guerrieri's role in Knowles' defense in 2024 is clear, but he will also need to take on a larger responsibility on the recruiting trail with Ohio State, another aspect of coaching that ultimately played a large role in the firing of Eliano. Guerrieri acknowledged that he is aware of the standard Ohio State has in the world of recruiting and that he is poised to uphold it with his authenticity and ability to build relationships.

"I think it starts with relationships, real authentic relationships," Guerrieri said. "You know, I think there's a lot of flashy, different things that happen from a recruiting standpoint. But it's about building real, authentic relationships. Your job as a coach — the old stage coach, right is (to take) someone from where they were to a desired destination. It starts in the recruiting process. Are you able to build authentic relationships and trust and be able to take that young man, who's a freshman or sophomore in high school, and be able to, over time, get them to where they want to be able to be? And then obviously, in turn, (get Ohio State) to where they want to be able to be? So I think real authentic relationships are where it starts."

Guerrieri's role at Ohio State is still not finalized, as he told the media that while he will be involved with special teams, the extent of his involvement is "still a work in progress." But no matter what his responsibilities are, he feels the opportunity to return to Ohio State in an expanded role with Knowles is something he will not take for granted.

"This is the best place in the country," Guerrieri said. "You get a chance to be at Ohio State. I'm from Cleveland, Ohio, this is home to me. (I'm) working with the best coordinator in the country, Jim Knowles, working for the best head coach in the country, Ryan Day. This place has everything that you ever dreamt of. So to be able to be here and work with the young men on the daily, this is a special opportunity."