

Secondary Displays Development In Spring Game



Even without the team's full complement of wide receivers on the opposite side of the ball, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day's confidence has continued growing in the team's secondary. In Saturday's spring game, they provided more reason for optimism.

The back end of the Buckeyes' defense broke up no less than 10 passes and allowed the team's quarterbacks to complete just 56.4 percent of passes for 332 yards, a mere 5.4 yards per pass attempt.

"You try to look at it through the whole 15 practices, what you've seen," Day said. "If you're starting to see the secondary get some hands on some balls, then all of a sudden it doesn't happen for a few days, it's probably not real. We've seen that for almost 15 practices, what you saw today. So that was really good."

Perhaps the most impressive of the bunch from Ohio State's secondary was junior cornerback Denzel Burke.

Burke broke up a pass and remained stride-for-stride in coverage with his assignments all scrimmage long, starting alongside junior cornerback Jordan Hancock.

"My confidence has always been high," Burke said. "I've always known what I can do. It's just a matter of applying it to the game on Saturdays."

An alteration in mentality has helped the Arizona native, he added afterward. Last year was an up-and-down season for him, not only in his quality of play but for his health. He had injuries in both one of his hands and his lower body.

"I've taken a different approach this year, more of a pro approach," Burke said. "The way I've been moving on and off the field has translated to the field. So I've just got to stay present in the moment and keep going every single day."

Also recording pass breakups from the DB group were sophomore Sonny Styles, who had two to go with six tackles, freshman cornerback Jermaine Mathews, freshman safety Malik Hartford and walk-on

cornerback Cameron Kittle.

Day feels larger tests are coming in fall camp when starting wide receivers Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming, alongside starting tight end Cade Stover, are back and at full health. But he can notice a day-to-day difference even now.

“I think the challenge will be increased in the preseason when we’re at full strength there,” Day said. “But you can see the discernment — everything is faster. They’re moving faster, they’re seeing it, and I think being year two in the system, adding Davison (Igbinosun), you’re starting to see the secondary move faster, make more plays, be more decisive.”

Moving forward the coach will be looking for continued consistency as the team looks to limit the big plays that cost it against Michigan and Georgia last season.

“Coming out of the spring, I do (feel confident),” Day said. “I think the first thing was the back end (of the defense), explosives. You saw today, we didn’t really give up a lot of explosives. Just a couple in the second half. That’s important for us. We expect to score a lot of points on offense, and if we can avoid explosive plays (on defense), that’s a recipe for winning.”