

Several Candidates Standing Out At Jack Position



In the search for someone to fill defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' new Jack position - a hybrid defensive end/linebacker - Ohio State has settled on a handful of candidates who could fill the role.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson said Tuesday that the Buckeyes are currently training sophomore defensive end Jack Sawyer and fifth-year linebackers Javontae Jean-Baptiste and Palaie Gaoteote IV. Freshman Caden Curry has also been seen during fall camp with this group.

"I think our guys love it and love this system," Johnson said. "They love what it brings to the table. So they're having fun in it right now."

Johnson, the lone holdout from last year's defensive staff, said he has enjoyed the changes being made to Ohio State's defense. While training the Jack (eventually referred as the Leo once a player has earned the designation) does not fall under Johnson's purview, he's excited to see what it adds to the defense.

"I like the new tool," Johnson said. "I like what we're doing right now defensively. I think coach Knowles has got a great system, and I like how he's allowed the guys who have the ability to play and use their ability, and I think that's cool. I think that's what defense is all about."

The Jack will have to combine a penchant for rushing the passer as well as dropping back into coverage, able to work as a linebacker or a stand-up defensive end in Ohio State's new defense. It takes unique player and body type to be able to fulfill this role, but whoever ultimately fills the role could turn into a game changer for the Buckeyes.

"(Knowles) is really big on rush and coverage together," Johnson said. "That's all he talks about. That's really cool. Guys understand if we rush and they cover, we're all going to be successful. I think that's really huge."