

Staff Stashing Streamlined Role For Sophomore Styles



While he should have still been on winter break after his first semester of his senior year of high school, Sonny Styles was guarding two of the nation's best tight ends in the College Football Playoff semifinals.

Georgia's Brock Bowers and Darnell Washington challenged the then-freshman and former five-star safety prospect out of Pickerington (Ohio) Central, as the staff trusted him enough to line him up close to the box for 12 snaps during the team's most important game of the season.

"It gave me confidence, that trust (the coaching staff) had in me," Styles said. "Getting ready throughout that month we had, it was a good month for me. I think I gained some confidence, almost like (fall) camp again. Them putting that confidence in me, giving me that big of a role in that big of a game, that meant a lot."

Now entering year two of his OSU career, Styles figures to have a featured role in the team's defense throughout the season — even if that role isn't clearly defined just yet.

"We've streamlined it for Sonny, so you'll see Sonny more in a streamlined position to where he can excel and use his God-given ability," safeties coach Perry Eliano said. "The beauty of it now is, year two, I've been around the guys, they've been around me. I know exactly what they are and where their strengths are, and we're continuing to close the gap on their challenges."

Eliano added that Styles having his first full spring under his belt after joining the program during the fall in 2022 will also be a huge help in his development.

There's no doubting Styles is a versatile athlete. At Pickerington Central he played over the top at deep safety, at more of a linebacker depth and off the edge on the line of scrimmage to pressure quarterbacks.

Eliano and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles have been toying and tooling with different roles for Styles, but the safeties coach is hoping to lock him into one spot sooner rather than later.

"It still remains to be seen (what his role will be)," Eliano said. "We're kind of dabbling in some things. Really and truthfully, we want him to be great at specific things instead of O.K. at a lot of things. So that's the conversation, what I mean by streamlining. So you won't see him in a lot of places, you'll see

him stationary in one to two spots.”

That position seems to be either bandit or adjuster, the team’s boundary and field safety positions, respectively. Styles’ physicality and burst make him a natural fit at bandit, but he has the range to make an impact at adjuster, too.

“Right now I’m kind of just doing two positions, trying to get good at one thing, not trying to be O.K. at everything,” Styles said. “Whatever Coach E puts in front of me, I’ll focus on that.”

In the meantime, Styles is working to earn playing time in a crowded safeties room. Redshirt junior Lathan Ransom returns after starting last year at bandit, and graduate Josh Proctor has been rolling next to him at adjuster with the starting unit thus far in spring practice. Syracuse transfer Ja’Had Carter’s primary position seems to be nickel but the coaches have said he could play any of the three safety spots.

Fellow sophomore Kye Stokes made waves last spring game and will be a factor in the competition at adjuster as well, with senior Kourt Williams II returning as a former captain in the back end as well.

“Coach E talks about it, the best players are going to play,” Styles said. “So you’ve just got to make the most out of every rep.”