

# JT Tuimoloau Expects Fast, Physical, Fun Defense



Nearly all the narratives around Ohio State's defense this offseason have involved the unit taking another step forward in some form or another.

Its numbers jumped across the board from 2021 to 2022 in its transition from defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs to defensive coordinator Jim Knowles, but the Buckeyes' ball stoppers still put up lackluster showings in the team's two most important games of the year, those against Michigan and Georgia.

Knowles has a track record of having better defenses the longer he is at a destination, in part due to his intricate scheme. From the perspective of Ohio State junior defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau, who spoke at Big Ten Media Days July 26, it's a simple recipe for the defense to take its next leap.

"This year as a defense, we've just got to play fast, play physical and have fun," Tuimoloau said. "That's one thing Coach Knowles has always preached and he's always reminding us of what it means to be a silver bullet, what it takes."

Tuimoloau himself is working to grow in his production.

He put out one of the greatest individual defensive performances in team history on Oct. 29, picking up six tackles with three tackles for loss, two sacks, a forced fumble, a fumble recovery, two interceptions and a deflected pass that turned into yet another interception. He manufactured a total of four takeaways, and ran one of his interceptions back for a touchdown.

On the rest of the season, though, he had just 1.5 sacks total and averaged less than two tackles per game.

"(It's about) just being more consistent," Tuimoloau said. "After seeing that game, it proved a lot to me. It was just, 'Man, let's continue to have that mindset and continue to build on it, and just be consistent and string games together and make it more fluid.'"

A more expert-level grasp of the Knowles scheme should help him achieve that week-in, week-out efficacy, a trend that he thinks will apply to the other 10 players surrounding him on his side of the ball.

“Being in the second year with Coach Knowles, it’s become very comfortable,” Tuimoloau said. “We know Coach Knowles. First year was, kind of, an introduction with Coach Knowles. But this year allows us to grow even more. Grow our relationship with Coach Knowles, player-to-coach, person-to-person too.”

The Buckeyes have fallen short of their stated goals each of the past two seasons — both years Tuimoloau has been on the team — those being beat Michigan, win the Big Ten and win the national championship.

Faults in Ohio State’s defense have been a top reason as to why. Tuimoloau enters this campaign motivated to right those wrongs. Whether he and the defense can play the fast, physical, fun style that will be required to right the ship in the rivalry will remain to be seen.

“Speaking to all the past (players) who I’ve gotten a chance to have conversations with and knowing that they have a pair of gold pants and they have a Big Ten championship ring, it motivates me even more to achieve that,” Tuimoloau said.