

“Unicorn” Sonny Styles Poised For Enhanced Role In 2023



Reclassifying as a true freshman at just 17 years old, Ohio State safety Sonny Styles made the most of his first year as a Buckeye, logging the second-most snaps by an Ohio State true freshman (280) in 2022 while registering nine tackles in 12 games.

Now, with a full offseason and an added 11 pounds of muscle under his belt, the now 18-year-old Styles is poised to make a significant impact in year two of Jim Knowles' secondary with his unique versatility and physicality.

“I mean, he’s kind of a unicorn,” Ohio State safeties coach Perry Eliano said after practice on Tuesday. “I love the kid.”

Styles, who first joined head coach Ryan Day’s program on Dec. 15, 2021 after signing his National Letter of Intent with Ohio State, said his decision to reclassify and play for the Buckeyes last season allowed the safety to familiarize himself with the speed and nuances of the college game, something that he noted will help him in 2023.

“I think (reclassifying) was a really good decision,” Styles told the media at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center Tuesday. “I felt reclassifying would set me up for this year, and I think it did. I was able to get a year under my belt. I got some experience in a big game. And I think that really pushed my confidence ahead. Coming in as a freshman, it’s a little harder to try and compete for a starting job on day one. Not saying that I couldn’t have tried to compete, but I think it put me in a better place to compete for it (this year).”

While spending an extra season in the program boosted his overall confidence level heading into his second year, it also provided him the opportunity to better understand Knowles' complex 4-2-5 system. This is a quality that Eliano has observed in Styles throughout the offseason and into fall camp.

“I think the uniqueness of Sonny is just his football IQ,” Eliano said. “His ability to truly process and articulate (things). His ability to be coached and understand the pieces around him at such a young age. I think that’s where the uniqueness is, because you don’t get that all the time.”

Styles' impressive football acumen given his young age has prompted Eliano and Knowles to move the

18-year-old safety across the secondary throughout fall camp. Although the Buckeyes' defensive coordinator told the media that he intends to start him at the nickel position, he has also used Styles at the adjuster/free safety and bandit/strong safety roles.

"We know exactly what we want to do with him," Eliano said. "We've created a great plan for him. We've thought it through. And we're excited about what it's going to look like."

While some collegiate athletes may struggle to learn how to operate at different positions, Styles said he has fully embraced his versatile role, as it will allow him to impact the game in several different ways.

"My favorite thing is making plays in multiple slots," Styles said. "Going from the half, to being in the box, to playing the middle of the field, to playing man-to-man, to be able to do it all."

"I think there's opportunities to make plays anywhere," Styles continued. "It's just different kind of plays, based on where I am."