

Wisconsin Head Coach Luke Fickell Wants Former Teammate Mike Vrabel At WU In Informal Role



Wisconsin head coach Luke Fickell is interested in reuniting with another familiar face for the 2024 season, telling ESPN's Pete Thamel on Thursday that he is hoping to add former Ohio State teammate and recently-fired Tennessee Titans head coach Mike Vrabel to his staff this upcoming season in an informal role.

Fickell, who is entering his second year as the Badgers' head coach, told ESPN that he wants to have the 48-year-old Vrabel around his program "as much as possible," a major addition to the Badgers' staff that he thinks could start sometime during the offseason.

"I love Mike and want him around as much as possible," Fickell told ESPN. "I want to see how much he'd like to be around, the spring for sure. And we'll go from there."

Vrabel has been left without a coaching role since he was fired by the Tennessee Titans on Jan. 9 after leading the organization for the last six seasons and accumulating a 54-45 overall record that included three straight playoff appearances from 2019-2021. Vrabel attempted to gain a new head coaching opportunity in the NFL — even reportedly taking three interviews with the Atlanta Falcons, Carolina Panthers and Los Angeles Chargers — but he was ultimately left out of this year's head coaching cycle.

An anonymous quote to The Athletic's Dianna Russini suggested that Vrabel may have been left out of a head coaching job in the NFL due to his physical and intimidating stature as well as his age, but Fickell doesn't see this is a problem, joking to ESPN that he will not be phased by Vrabel's 6-foot-4 frame if he is to join the program.

Fickell, a former All-American nose tackle and longtime assistant coach at Ohio State, has a close relationship with Vrabel that dates back to their playing days with the Buckeyes. The two defensive linemen were teammates at Ohio State from 1993-1996 and also coached together with the Buckeyes from 2011-2013.

Vrabel, who was a two-time All-American himself as well as an three-time All-Big Ten selection, was Ohio State's linebackers coach in 2011 during Fickell's lone season as the Buckeyes' interim coach. He also served as a defensive line coach under head coach Urban Meyer from 2012-13 alongside Fickell, who was Meyer's co-defensive coordinator and linebackers coach.

If the two friends are to be reunited at Wisconsin, Fickell said it would be a gradual process, with the former NFL head coach heading up to Madison sometime during the spring before determining what exact role he would play on the team.

"I'm not sure exactly if this was his choice, or what it is the future looks like, but I know that we're going to have a visitor here that's going to spend a little bit of time, hopefully around us," Fickell told ESPN's Wisconsin "Wilde & Tausch" in early February. "Starting, coming up in the spring and some things like that, see how much, how deep we can get involved with my buddy and get him around here."

Fickell, who is fresh off hauling in the 23rd-best recruiting class in the nation, led the Badgers to a 7-6 record and a bowl appearance in his first year leading Wisconsin.