

2021 In-State WR Jayden Ballard Becomes Top Target For Ohio State

Ohio State opened its one-day position camps June 9 of last year in Columbus with an eyebrow-raising offer to a rising sophomore at the time.

After his standout performance against defensive in the 2019 and 2020 recruiting classes, Jayden Ballard was a rare instance of an in-state underclassman on the Buckeyes' board so early.

OSU's only other 2021 scholarship extended in Ohio at the time was Pickerington North defensive end Jack Sawyer (6-5, 220), who picked up his bid April 9, 2018, and committed Feb. 3.

Over the past 11 months, Ballard has quietly navigated the process.

The 6-2, 175-pounder instead lets his game do the bulk of the talking.

He followed a breakout 2018 season at Massillon (Ohio) Washington, in which the Tigers went 14-1 overall, with an overpowering performance March 31 during The Opening Regional Canton inside the Paul L. David Athletic Training Center.

From intermediate routes to streaks downfield and jump balls, Ballard joined Muskegon, Mich., 2020 four-star athlete Cameron Martinez (5-11, 175) among the camp's most dominant receivers on the day.

"(The Opening) was way harder than some of the corners I go against," Ballard said. "They're much bigger than I am."

Massillon (Ohio) Washington 2021 wide receiver and Ohio State target Jayden Ballard (6-1 1/2, 164). pic.twitter.com/8dzALYndDr

— Garrett Stepien (@GarrettStepien) March 31, 2019

The Opening offered Ballard an opportunity to showcase his skills and he did, recording a 4.08-second 20-yard shuttle and 33.30-inch vertical jump before clocking a 4.60-second 40-yard dash May 5 at Massillon Washington's college showcase, the latter of which Ohio State attended.

"(The process) hasn't been the tough," Ballard said. "And I haven't been thinking about that (recruiting) stuff yet because I'm only a sophomore, so I'm just trying to keep going, moving forward."

Ballard's recruitment spiked after the Buckeyes entered the equation with roughly 20 offers in total, the latest from Oregon (Feb. 19) and Michigan State (May 8).

Beyond plans to see the Ducks at some point in the summer, Ballard's involvement with home-state OSU has been active.

After game-day visits in the fall, the spring brought Ballard back to Ohio Stadium for the April 13 game, building the bond with head coach Ryan Day and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

"I like them both a lot," said Ballard, who keeps weekly communication with Day and Hartline, the latter of whom is also from Stark County as a North Canton, Ohio, native. "Coach Hartline and Coach Day. (Hartline is) personable."

Prior to the annual scrimmage, Ballard stopped by campus Feb. 2 for junior day.

"(It was about) just talking to Coach Hartline and seeing more stuff," Ballard said.

While he has potential down the road in becoming a top receiver at the next level, Ballard puts his recruitment on the back burner with big shoes to fill ahead of the Tigers' 2019 campaign.

"Just getting really strong in the weight room and getting a little more faster," Ballard said of the offseason focus before he enters his junior year. "Becoming more of a go-to receiver (is the focus). (Without Tre'Von Morgan), I'll have to step up."

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