

2021 Michigan Five-Star Defensive Tackle Damon Payne Nears College Decision



Belleville, Mich., five-star defensive tackle Damon Payne has tabbed July 26 as the date he'll make his college decision.

Thank you to all the schools that have offered me I will be announcing my commitment on July 26th

— Dame (@DamonPayne2021) July 10, 2020

The 6-4, 297-pound Payne - who is considered the top-rated defensive tackle and No. 18 prospect overall in the class of 2021 - will choose among finalists Alabama, Arizona State, Kentucky, LSU, Michigan, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State and USC.

The Buckeyes were considered the favorite to land Payne from the time they offered him a scholarship back in April 2018 thanks - in large part - to defensive line coach Larry Johnson, who continues to churn out NFL-ready players at his position. But that lead eroded over time, and not because of a lack of interest from Ohio State's perspective. Simply put, communication between Johnson and the tight-lipped Payne dwindled, and the Buckeyes focused their attention elsewhere. Recruiting is a two-way street, after all.

Ohio State has since landed commitments along the defensive line from Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star end Jack Sawyer; Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star end Tunmise Adeleye; and Streetsboro, Ohio, four-star defensive tackle Michael Hall. The Buckeyes hope to add two more players in the trenches this cycle, with Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star J.T. Tuimoloau, Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star tackle Tywone Malone, Manassas (Va.) Stonewall Jackson four-star tackle

Tyleik Williams and Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) four-star defensive end Tyreek Sapp among their top remaining targets.

As for Payne, most prognosticators expect him to choose Alabama. The Crimson Tide have ramped up their pursuit in recent months and currently hold 92 percent of the 247Sports crystal ball predictions, with the other eight percent undecided.

It's worth keeping an eye on the Sun Devils, though, because of their staff's background in the NFL. Arizona State head coach Herm Edwards; co-defensive coordinators Marvin Lewis and Antonio Pierce; and defensive line coach Robert Rodriguez have all played in or coached at the NFL level.

The Wildcats are also a dark horse in Payne's recruitment given their recent success in Michigan, as they notably pulled four-star offensive guard Marquan McCall and four-star defensive tackle Justin Rogers out of Oak Park in 2018 and 2020, respectively, despite them garnering interest from some of the nation's top programs.

For four free issues of the now-monthly print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, sign up at the link below. No credit card required: <http://www.buckeyesports.com/subscribe-4issue-trial/>