

A Look At Where Ohio State Stands On National Signing Day 2021



Though traditionally viewed as a holiday, National Signing Day has lost some of its luster in recent years due to the introduction of the Early Signing Period. It's made things relatively drama free for Ohio State, as well, since the Buckeyes received letters of intent from all 21 commitments on Dec. 16.

Ohio State also currently sits at 84 scholarship players, not including seniors like running back Demario McCall, offensive tackle Thayer Munford, defensive tackles Haskell Garrett and Antwuan Jackson and cornerback Marcus Williamson opting to return for an extra year of eligibility, which leaves the Buckeyes with just one roster spot open for any potential recruits in the class of 2021, such as Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau, or transfer players like former Tennessee linebacker Henry To'oto'o, former USC linebacker Palaie Gaoteote former Texas cornerback Jalen Green.

"It's tricky, and it's tricky now because there's a lot of dynamics in play with the extra year of eligibility," head coach Ryan Day said, noting how the one-time transfer rule might create some attrition in the coming months. "If there are certain people out there that we really want to save a spot for, we will. We'll always make sure we have something available for a great player."

Tuimoloau's situation is unique in that he did not make his college decision on National Signing Day, and while that's when most undecided prospects send in their letter of intent, they actually have until April 1 to do so. Furthermore, prospects are not required to sign a letter of intent at any point and can simply sign a financial aid agreement with the school of their choice.

That's the route Tuimoloau will take, as he plans to take visits to Alabama and Ohio State in April. The plan is for the visits to be in an official capacity, provided the NCAA brings to an end the ongoing recruiting dead period that will run through at least April 15. But if that is extended, Tuimoloau will make the trips on his own dime.

Tuimoloau, who named a top five on Dec. 16 of Alabama, Ohio State, Oregon, USC and Washington, has never been to Columbus. He has spent time on the campus of the four other finalist, however, which includes participating in a summer camp with the Crimson Tide as a sophomore and unofficial visits with the Ducks, Trojans and Huskies.

The Buckeyes have long been considered the favorite in Tuimoloau's recruitment thanks to his

relationship with head coach Ryan Day, defensive line coach Larry Johnson and wide receivers Gee Scott and Emeka Egbuka, the former being his former teammate and the latter being a fellow Washington native. But that said, there's still a long way to go in his recruitment.

Of note, the last time high-profile Ohio State target pushed his recruitment past National Signing Day was Jeannette, Pa., five-star quarterback Terrelle Pryor, who ended up signing with the Buckeyes as part of the class of 2008. The hope is that Tuimoloau – who is considered the second-best defensive end and No. 3 prospect overall in the 2021 cycle – will follow those footsteps to Columbus.

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Tuimoloau's commitment would give Ohio State its best recruiting class of the internet era, at least in terms of per-player average, as it would raise the Buckeyes' average to .9477. That would top the 2017 class, which finished with an average rating of .9459, the highest of all time.

However, Alabama's current class, which features 26 players, has eclipsed that mark (.9490) and could move to .9500 if the Crimson Tide land a commitment from Tallahassee (Fla.) John Paul II Catholic four-star safety Terrion Arnold, as expect, later this afternoon.

Still, the fact that Ohio State's class, with six or seven fewer commits, stacks up as one of the greatest of all time is worth celebrating.

The roster could get even better with the addition of one of the aforementioned transfers, though there is no timeline for when they will announce their respective decisions, so Ohio State is hoping to get each of them on campus when the dead period comes to an end.

The Buckeyes are set to break in three new starting linebackers next fall, which is why To'oto'o and Gaoteote are enticing options and have reciprocated the interest, whereas there's an opening in the much-maligned secondary for Green after All-American cornerback Shaun Wade announced his NFL Draft intentions last month.

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