

After Recovering From Injuries, Kourt Williams II Hoping To See The Field At Linebacker



After last season was plagued by injuries, this upcoming year could be the change of pace that Kourt Williams II needs entering his fourth season at Ohio State.

Williams, in a shift from his first three seasons with the Buckeyes, opened up fall camp on Thursday playing at linebacker, a move that both he and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said has been in the works “for a while” as Ohio State looks for a way to get the returning captain on the field.

“Kourt, he’s a guy we always felt would be better off closer to the line of scrimmage,” Knowles said. “We’ve debated that move for a while. In-house, he’s kind of moved back and forth. We just thought it was the right time to move him down fully. He’ll still play some Sam linebacker in our 4-3, but Kourt is a first-class young man. It’s great to have him at linebacker.”

It offers a reset for Williams, who has seen his career at Ohio State stunted by injuries. The former four-star prospect missed his freshman season with a torn ACL, and after playing in 11 games during the 2021-22 season, he played in just six games last year while dealing with shoulder injuries that resulted in a trio of surgeries over the past year.

“It got to the point where if I tried to shake somebody’s hand, my shoulder would come out,” Williams said. “I couldn’t catch. It got real bad.”

It cost him what could have been a breakout season, but he was instead relegated to the sidelines. But voted as a captain prior to last season, he still made sure to support his teammates even though he was largely unable to see the field.

“It wasn’t easy, but I just wanted to be there for my teammates,” he said. “I didn’t expect to have three surgeries on my shoulders last year, but I did the best I could in that moment. I just wanted to be there for the guys.”

With the injuries mostly behind Williams – he said Thursday that his shoulders feel “OK” but that he is able to go – he is now looking toward making his transition to linebacker for Ohio State. He said he is

primarily learning to play at Will linebacker, which firmly puts him behind Steele Chambers and C.J. Hicks on the depth chart, so it will be an uphill climb with those two expected to take the bulk of the snaps.

But Williams does have some prior experience, having played Will linebacker in high school, and he said the transition has not been too challenging thus far.

“It’s actually not bad. I know the system, I know the defense, so it’s not that hard of a transition,” he said. “It’s just getting the little things like reading linemen, pulls, all that stuff that I’m not really used to. I’ve got to get used to it again.”

Williams already has some experience playing near the line of scrimmage – he has four tackles for loss in his career – and he said he brings attributes that will help him be successful at linebacker such as his speed and strength, though he said he has to work on stopping the run. Williams described the switch back to linebacker as like “riding a bike,” and Chambers said that Williams has already shown a strong grasp of his new position since switching over.

“He’s been here for like two days and he already knows a lot of it,” Chambers said. “I mean, you saw us going split-field today, so he was taking a lot of reps. From what I heard, he was on the other field, but he was doing really well just being able to get a grasp of a decent amount of plays that we put into this. I mean, that’s fantastic. That’s just a testament to who he is.”