

Al Washington Comfortable With Returning Ohio State Linebackers



Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington joined the Buckeyes this offseason following a rough 2018 season for the group he was taking over.

None of that really mattered to him.

“I watched a little bit, but I kind of wanted to have a clean slate. When I got here in the winter, they were in offseason workouts, so I just wanted to get to know them through that,” Washington said. “I want to be judged on what I’m doing now.

“Last year was last year.”

With a clean slate in mind, that would seemingly open the door to a new starting lineup after the group of senior Malik Harrison, junior Tuf Borland and junior Pete Werner had its fair share of struggles at points a season ago.

But just over a week before the first game of the season against Florida Atlantic, Washington’s plan is to primarily play the same starters from a season ago.

He said the clean slate allowed him to just watch the players he had in his group, and that the same linebackers managed to stand out, partly due to the valuable experience from a season ago.

Washington also had praise for the two linebackers that received the most criticism: Borland and Werner.

On Borland, Washington said the critiques are a common topic between him and the redshirt junior middle linebacker, but that the outside noise doesn’t matter: the internal noise does.

“He is an ultra-competitive kid, he’s gotten better from practice one to now, he’s a perfectionist,” Washington said. “We talk about it every day that you know what, the criticism and the compliments, it’s about what you think. You look in the mirror, and you know if you’re putting in the work.”

Washington also likes what he’s seen from Borland’s leadership, even if he isn’t the loudest player, both in the locker room and in interviews.

"I see why he's a captain," Washington said. "I like that he's soft spoken, because his actions speak louder anyway, right?"

When talking about Werner, Washington brought up a story to explain the work ethic the junior weak-side linebacker brings to the table.

"One of the coaches stood in front of the special teams room and just said 'hey, this is a clip of Pete Werner running down playing kickoff, doing a great job,' but here he is today taking notes on it," Washington said. "That's Pete Werner man, I mean he's probably watching film now."

Werner, as well as Borland, as well as the entire linebacker position, will be under a microscope to start the season after taking the blame for not stopping the big plays and being out of position.

But, under Washington's "clean slate," none of that matters to him. He has seen Werner as a special talent during camp.

"Pete will do exactly what you need him to do, and he will bust his tail, and he just finds the way to get the ball," Washington said. "Pete Werner, this camp, has probably had one of the best camps that I've seen a guy have, and I'm not just saying that. I mean that guy is a warrior, and I have a ton of respect for him the way he goes about his business."

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