

Assessing Ohio State's Defensive Back Depth Heading Into Spring Practice



With starting cornerbacks Damon Arnette and Jeff Okudah and safety Jordan Fuller off to the NFL, Ohio State's most obvious roster flaw heading into spring practice is the lack of experience and depth in the secondary.

That problem was only exacerbated by the recent dismissal of senior cornerback Amir Riep and fifth-year senior linebacker/safety Jahsen Wint, who were arrested and charged with felony rape and kidnapping on Feb. 12.

The Buckeyes are fortunate to have projected first-round pick Shaun Wade back for his redshirt junior season, as he spurned the NFL in an effort to improve his coverage on the outside after starting in the slot last season. He'll likely be backed up by his high school teammate Tyreke Johnson, a former five-star prospect who has yet to make an impact during two seasons in Columbus.

If not Johnson, early enrollee freshman Ryan Watts — a four-star prospect from Little Elm, Texas — figures to be in the conversation for immediate playing time.

Juniors Sevyn Banks and Cameron Brown will compete to start opposite of Wade, though it's probably new-defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs will rotate them throughout the game as he did during his previous tenure as cornerbacks coach.

There's also a chance whoever comes second in that battle moves inside to play the slot, where Ohio State's depth is lacking considerably with Riep no longer on the roster. He was the first player of the bench when Wade was sidelined during the 56-27 win over Michigan and was expected to play a significant role this fall.

Senior Marcus Williamson is most likely to assume that role, though he'll have to earn it after playing sparingly in lopsided victories and on special teams for much of the last three seasons. Early enrollee freshman Lejond Cavazos could also make a push for the spot after playing a similar role at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy.

Muskegon (Mich.) four-star athlete Cameron Martinez is also an option at cornerback if he ultimately ends up playing defense at the next level, though he'll also get a shot to play slot receiver, as well, when

he arrives in the summer.

Safety, meanwhile, is a little more cut-and-dried following the departure of team captain and starter in the aforementioned Fuller.

Junior Josh Proctor has long been the heir apparent at the single high safety spot, and he played meaningful snaps late in the Big Ten Championship Game and Fiesta Bowl. Sophomore Marcus Hooker should also be in line for playing time after contributing on special teams last fall, especially if the Buckeyes opt for more two-safety sets under Coombs than they did under the direction of former co-defensive coordinator and secondary coach Jeff Hafley. And that's where Wint, who recorded two interceptions in last year's spring game, figured into the equation.

Redshirt freshmen Ronnie Hickman and Bryson Shaw and incoming freshman Lathan Ransom all figure to see the field in some capacity, as well.