

Day “Encouraged” By Progress Of Defensive Backs



Ohio State’s quest to evolve from the mistakes that cost them big plays in losses to Georgia and Michigan last season continues, and Ryan Day is admiring the gains made in the team’s secondary.

During his press conference Wednesday, the Buckeyes’ head coach had a lot of positive things to say about the cornerback and safety rooms.

“It’s year two in the system, more experience and a couple added pieces,” Day said. “I’ve been encouraged.”

Day’s been particularly impressed with the team’s cornerbacks in this early phase of the run up to football season.

Junior Denzel Burke enters his third year as a starter, attempting to rebound from a down year in 2022. Injuries had something to do with that, and he’s looked much stronger thus far in 2023, per Day.

“I think Denzel is playing his best football right now,” Day said. “I’m just impressed with his offseason, impressed with his approach every day. He’s gotten his hands on a lot of balls, had a huge interception in the two-minute drill the other day.”

Another player that dealt with an even more serious injury in 2022 is junior Jordan Hancock. A hamstring issue sidelined him for the first six contests Ohio State played, and he never quite captured the form that had OSU coaches raving about him during fall camp.

“Now that he’s healthy, you’re starting to see his potential pop,” Day said. “He came off that really bad hamstring injury and never was quite himself last year. He’s somebody that we’ve got a lot of excitement around.”

The best of the bunch could be Ole Miss transfer Davison Igbinosun, however. The tallest player in the room at 6-2 with a wide wingspan, he’s contested a lot of attempted catches from Ohio State’s receivers

in practice.

"Davison has been a great addition," Day said. "It's been great to see him be out there and compete. I think he's raising the level of everybody in that room."

Day added that sophomore Jyaire Brown has natural talent and instincts at either the corner or nickelback positions, and that freshman Jermaine Mathews and sophomore Ryan Turner have been competing as depth options.

"We're starting to get a group in there (at cornerback) that (cornerbacks coach) Tim (Walton) has now been able to spend year two with, and I think the addition of Davison and now a year of experience in that group, you're seeing their hands on a lot more balls, challenging throws" Day said. "Which is really exciting."

The safety competition remains ongoing for Ohio State, but there's a lot of depth and talent at the three spots that drive defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' scheme.

Graduate Josh Proctor is back for one final season at Ohio State and looking to recapture the form he found early in 2021 before being usurped by then-junior Lathan Ransom in 2022. Ransom and Proctor are currently sharing starting positions on the back end, with Ransom remaining at the bandit position and Proctor at adjuster, more a free safety role that Knowles feels is better suited to his talents.

Sophomore Sonny Styles will factor into the rotation as well, most likely at bandit. He's a former five-star prospect and beginning to show a lot of that talent. Syracuse transfer Ja'Had Carter is in competition with junior Cam Martinez to start at nickel.

"The safety position has been much more solid (this spring)," Day said. "Lathan and (Proctor) and Sonny, some of the guys back there have done a really nice job. Ja'Had Carter, who was playing well about midway through the spring, had a little bit of an injury. I don't know whether he's going to be available or not on Saturday but up until that point he had kind of raised the level of everybody back there."

Ohio State fans will get their first look at the Ohio State secondary at the team's spring game Saturday.