

Day, Frye Update O-Line Outlook



There's little question that the position with the most questions heading into the 2023 football season for Ohio State is offensive line.

Just two of the Buckeyes' five starters from the 2022 season return in 2023. The objective for head coach Ryan Day and offensive line coach Justin Frye, the duo stated in interviews Feb. 1, is to find the best five offensive linemen the team has and put them in the starting lineup in the best possible places to succeed.

"We're going to play our five best," Frye said. "Or six best. At the end of the year last year, at some points Josh (Fryar) was playing tight end."

That will start with the two returning starters, third-year Donovan Jackson and graduate Matthew Jones, who started at left and right guard, respectively, in 2022.

Exiting high school as a center per recruiting outlets and starting his Ohio State career as a backup at the position, there was some thought that Jones could slide over to replace 2022 starting center Luke Wypler, who declared for the NFL Draft after just three seasons in Columbus. Day confirmed otherwise Wednesday.

"Right now the idea is to keep Matt and Donovan at guards, find a center," Day said. "I think Carson Hinzman had a really good bowl practice and Jakob (James) won't be here this spring, but he'll be in the battle."

Frye ran through a list of potential options at the position. Among them were transfer portal acquisition Vic Cutler, who played tackle at UL-Monroe last year, Hinzman and fifth-year Enokk Vimahi, who has been a guard to this point in his career.

"Having Luke Wypler declare, we needed another guy, especially inside," Day said. "So I'm looking forward to seeing what (Cutler) can do this spring."

"That position in and of itself, that's a lot of communication in our offense," Frye said. "So the guy in there has got to be heady and smart, and get in his fit and set right as we go about those things."

Not included in that discussion was James, a fourth-year and former three-star prospect who served as the team's backup center in 2022 but will miss spring practice with injury. Incoming freshman Josh Padilla, a four-star prospect out of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne, rounds out the list of potential centers.

Fryar, a fourth-year offensive tackle, seems a surefire starter after seeing meaningful reps in spot duty and sub-packages in 2022. His spot is likely at left tackle, though he could remain on the right side where he played last season.

"You've got to see how guys function that way," Frye said. "Some guys are right-brained and left-brained, some guys are left-brained. Internal guys can play both sides. That's just a feel thing right now, we'll figure that out."

Similar to Jones, there was discussion that Jackson could slide out to offensive tackle if needed in 2023, but Day and Frye put those discussions to bed Wednesday. Instead it appears third-year Zen Michalski and second-year Tegra Tshabola are the leading candidates to compete at the spot opposite Fryar. Second-year George Fitzpatrick is another name Frye threw out.

"You get a chance for these young guys to go and operate at the tackle position and see what happens," Frye said. "If we were starting today, who's playing the game? Five guys. I don't know who they are yet, but there will be five of them."

Frye doesn't view the uncertainty ahead of him and his position room as a cause for anxiety, however. He's eager to get to work ironing out the details and developing green players. That starts with spring practice this March and April.

"(The uncertainty) makes us the hungriest, so I'm excited," Frye said. "You come and sit at the table last year and you get thrown out, 'Well you've got an All-American guy here, you've got this guy here, and you've got Dawand (Jones) and Paris (Johnson) and those guys.' And that was all great, and we had a great year, we worked really well together. Moving on to now, that's the coaching part of it. Yeah, we have some younger guys who are less experienced guys, but they're all hungry."