

Early Signing Period: Four-Star Safety Malik Hartford Signs With Ohio State



Get to know West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star safety Malik Hartford, who signed his national letter of intent with Ohio State on Wednesday.

Height, Weight: 6-2.5, 175.

247 Composite Rankings: He's rated as the 163rd overall prospect, No. 11 safety and fourth-best player from Ohio in the class.

Commitment Date: Hartford committed to Ohio State on April 6.

Other Offers: Alabama, Boston College, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Duke, Eastern Kentucky, Georgia Tech, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa State, Kentucky, Louisville, Miami (Ohio), Michigan, Michigan State, Nebraska, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Penn State, Purdue, Tennessee, Toledo, Vanderbilt, West Virginia

How he did in high school: Hartford helped lead Lakota West to an 11-2 record in 2021 by racking up 58 tackles, two interceptions, a sack and blocked six kicks during his junior season as the starting safety.

He remained a dominant force in the Firebirds' backend in 2022 and was named Ohio Division I Co-Defensive Player of the Year. Hartford collected 43 tackles (four for loss), five pass breakups and two interceptions during his senior season.

Why he committed to Ohio State: There were several factors that led Hartford to Ohio State, most notably his relationship with safeties coach Perry Eliano, as well as defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' scheme — which places three safeties on the field at a time.

"I picked the Buckeyes because they are not only a great program, but a great school," Hartford told

247Sports. "I love the three safety scheme they run, and they are great at developing players. I was impressed with the program as a whole. Just an amazing place to be."

Where he fits in for 2023: Hartford will enter a safeties room that will likely be in flux ahead of the 2023 season. Current starters Ronnie Hickman and Tanner McCalister have already confirmed that they'll move on after OSU's College Football Playoff run, while Lathan Ransom could still declare for the draft. With young talent waiting in the wings in Kye Stokes, Sonny Styles and Cameron Martinez, and Hartford one of three incoming freshmen at the position, it'll likely be hard for him to find the field as a safety next season.

However, Hartford will likely make an impact on Ohio State's special teams units. As he collected six kick blocks during his junior season, he's already shown a knack for creating game-changing plays on special teams.