

Enokk Vimahi Still Pushing For Playing Time



The one thing that Ohio State had settled along its offensive line all spring is who the guards would be.

Junior Donovan Jackson and graduate Matthew Jones, returning as the starters last season, were the anchors to a front five replacing key pieces in every other spot. That left redshirt junior offensive guard Enokk Vimahi, a player who saw the field both due to injury and as an extra offensive lineman last year, on the outside looking in for playing time.

Listening to how offensive line coach Justin Frye talked about the fourth-year player on May 30, perhaps it's too early to write off the chance that Vimahi could find his way to the field.

"I told Enokk, as we're sitting here today, if we were going (to play a game right now), then Enokk's got to be on the field somewhere, somehow because of what he did in the spring," Frye said.

Vimahi is a true guard, and it doesn't appear the staff have any ambitions of slotting him in elsewhere. He's also not going to overtake Jackson or Jones, established starters who Frye has repeatedly referenced as the cornerstones of the 2023 offensive line.

What would need to happen is for one of those two players to change positions. Both have experience at other spots.

Jones actually exited high school as a center prospect, and spent some time as a backup at the spot previously in his Ohio State career. All his meaningful in-game experience has come at guard, but a move of Jones to fill the open center position currently being competed for by Carson Hinzman, Jakob James and Vic Cutler isn't an inconceivable one.

Then there's Jackson, whose athleticism and length have always made him a possibility at tackle. He drilled there during the spring in 2022 when the team faced some depth issues.

Still, the natural and best position for both players is at guard.

"Donnie could play all five. No one's asking him to do that but talent-wise and athleticism, he's as good as you're going to be around," Frye said. "I hope we don't have to break that glass though. I'll put that out there. But could Donnie do it if he needed to? Absolutely. Could Matt slide over and play a different position if he needed to? Yeah."

All that being said, Vimahi's athletic tools at four years of development in Columbus have Frye questioning ways he could see the field.

"He's a powerful, strong guy, and he played that way coming out of the spring," Frye said. "I think for him, just going into later in his career now, it took him a little longer for it to slow down. But he played strong, he played powerful, made less mistakes. It's just the natural maturation of an offensive lineman."

The top priority for Frye is getting his five best offensive linemen on the field, as he's stated throughout the offseason. Vimahi is making a case as one of those five. Whether he can actually make enough waves to cause the shuffle required for him to get to a starting spot, however, remains to be seen.

"At the end of the day, we've got to play our five best," Frye said. "You've probably heard me say this a million times, but if the right guard goes down and the backup right guard is not your sixth best guy — your (starting) right tackle is — you've got to find a way to get your fifth-best guy on the field."