

Hicks Looking For Role In Second Year



Exiting high school as a five-star recruit brings certain expectations.

It's hard for any player to see the field as a freshman, but now entering his sophomore season Ohio State linebacker C.J. Hicks is hoping for his shot to make an impact in Ohio State's defense.

"I feel like I am ready, but I'm going to trust Coach (Jim) Knowles and wherever his system is," Hicks said. "At the end of the day, trust God as well."

Hicks faces an uphill climb for playing time in many ways, primarily because both of Ohio State's starters at his position from last year — seniors Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers — returned for one final season.

While the two didn't rotate much at all last campaign and their primary backup, senior Cody Simon, is also back, Hicks and fellow sophomore Gabe Powers will have a shot to prove they deserve playing time per Knowles. Hicks feels he can do exactly that through fundamental plays in practice.

"(We see the field by) executing everything that we need to do and having fun while we're doing it," Hicks said. "Not getting in our heads as much as we did last year, because that was my problem coming in. I was thinking too much. Just go out there, play and have fun."

It's no secret that Knowles is high on his talent, too.

"Great athlete. Really good kid, good energy. Good team guy, and I think that is worth saying, right," said. "Because when you're five-star and Mr. Everything, I think it's challenging to come into a top five program and not play right away, but he handled it really well."

Another possibility for Hicks or other linebackers to see the field could be OSU's hybrid defensive end/linebacker "Jack" role, a specialist position that can rush the passer, set the edge against the run or drop into coverage.

Defensive end Jack Sawyer played the position last year, but has moved back to defensive end for now

while the defense as a whole places the position on the backburner. Knowles doesn't expect to do much work with it until fall.

"I haven't talked to him about it yet," Hicks said. "I have seen certain things, but I'm not going to take anything serious until he comes and talks to me about it.

"I feel like I can be a good player at Jack, in high school I rushed the passer a lot. But it's up to Coach Knowles. It's his defense."

Overall, though, Hicks's comfort level is growing. He feels the defense's is too.

"Guys are just reacting faster," Hicks said. "D-linemen are being d-linemen, getting to the quarterback. In the linebacker room, all of us are getting a grasp on what Coach Knowles is telling us. So everything's going good."