

Hinzman Making Case For Starting Center Job



After a surprise NFL Draft declaration from former Ohio State center Luke Wypler on Jan. 10, the Buckeyes found themselves in need of a new centerpiece on their offensive line.

The competition quickly shaped up with incumbent Buckeyes Jakob James and Carson Hinzman being thrown in the fray, and Louisiana Monroe transfer tackle Victor Cutler sliding inside to battle for the starting center spot. With James sidelined until the fall due to injury, Hinzman has a unique opportunity to set himself apart from the others, and it's not something he's taking lightly.

"Looking at the spring and coming off of bowl prep, (offensive line coach Justin Frye) was just talking about how every practice from there on, since the start of bowl prep, was going to be vital to what I want to do here," Hinzman said. "Looking at what I want to do here and trying to be a starter and doing everything I can to get that part, obviously the spring is going to be vital for that.

"We have a really good competition," he continued. "We have a lot of really good guys in our room. I think, personally, this spring is when most of the growth will happen."

Hinzman joined the Buckeyes last season in the summer and is undergoing his first spring camp in the program. He arrived in Columbus as the No. 9 inside offensive lineman and No. 177 overall recruit in the 2022 class, according to 247Sports, but did not see any action in his first season for the Buckeyes.

Hinzman has bounced across the offensive line in his time at Ohio State, starting at right tackle before moving inside and slotting in at center. There was an adjustment process for the Hammond, Wis., native, as he pointed to the fact that his first-ever snap at Ohio State flew over the head of quarterback Kyle McCord in a drill.

But as the season progressed, Hinzman began to improve at the position, citing after-hours workouts to refine his technique at center.

"Just being in (the Woody Hayes Athletic Center) for extra hours and stuff like that, I know (Tegra Tshabola) has caught a lot of balls for me," Hinzman said. "It's just roommates coming in and working

out with each other. It's been really great just having Kyle, (graduate assistant Mike Solenne) and (quarterback Devin Brown) coming in and catching balls from me every day. It's just trying to get that muscle memory down."

Although Hinzman was unable to find the field during his freshman campaign, he began to emerge during Ohio State's practices leading up to the Peach Bowl. For Hinzman, the bowl practices turned out to be a stepping stone into the competition for the starting center spot.

"I remember coming off of bowl prep and going back home and sitting down and just really visualizing what I want to do," Hinzman said. "After the first day (of camp), I've never felt more comfortable playing with the guys I do."

With center being a position that requires plenty of discipline, Hinzman may have a step up on his competitors in that regard due to his background in dairy farming. Growing up on a dairy farm, Hinzman was required to wake up at odd hours in order to work the farm, milk the cows or do other tasks required of him, helping build a level of diligence within him.

"Coming from that background, it's not more as if I'm — Coach Frye says it best — it's nothing is extra work if it's just the work that it takes to get to where you want to be," Hinzman said. "Being a dairy farmer and waking up every morning, we didn't think of it as work, we were just doing it because that needed to be done.

"I have a long way to go, obviously, but I'm trying to continue that work and work ethic that my grandparents and parents have passed down to me."

While Hinzman continues to gain comfortability in his role, Frye also recognized the growth that Hinzman has displayed at the position over time, adding that he's fit into the role well and is competing hard for the starting job left by Wypler.

"He's getting thrust in. He's not even been here for 12 months. So, 12 months ago from now, he was still bailing hay and knocking icicles off of the barn up in Wisconsin. Now, there's (defensive tackles) Mike Hall and Tyliek (Williams) and all of those guys in front of him," Frye said. "(He's) just getting out and competing that way and it's been good to see. You don't know these guys are going to go until you go let them play the game, and obviously we don't have games, but taking (he's) those live reps.

"He's embraced it, he's won some and he's lost some, so he's got to learn from those," he continued.