

How Does J.T. Tuimoloau Fit On Ohio State's Defense?



Recruits like 2021 Sammamish (Wa.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau don't come around every year - if you couldn't tell from the fervor around his recruitment, which came to a close on July 4 when he announced his commitment to Ohio State.

There's a reason that every top school in the nation wanted him, and there's a reason that his recruitment lasted five whole months longer than those of almost any of his 2021 classmates. While not the consensus top player in his class, Tuimoloau is a tremendously unique blend of athleticism and size, with the kind of developed technique that players of his stature generally lack when entering the college game. High schoolers checking in at 6-5, 277 pounds aren't supposed to be able to run like linebackers or bust out a swim move when rushing the passer.

Tuimoloau certainly has plenty of room to grow, both physically and in his understanding of the game, but the hype is absolutely warranted.

However, that often seems to be where the discussion around Tuimoloau ends. Buckeye fans know that their favorite team's new five-star defensive lineman is an athletic freak, capable of suiting up anywhere on the line while playing tight end on the other side of the ball, but there are far more important specifics when diving into how the newest Buckeye actually fits into the Ohio State defense - and when he'll get the chance to do it.

Firstly, as with any player, it's important to suss out positional fit. Originally considered an athletic, pass-rushing defensive tackle, Tuimoloau has shifted the narrative around his playstyle, declaring himself a big strongside end, rather than a player that makes his bones on the inside. It's a smart play for the sake of future earnings, and given his skill set, it seems to make sense for his development. Given that Ohio State's other star 2021 defensive end, Jack Sawyer, seems a bit more suited for the weakside as a pure rusher, Tuimoloau's fit at Ohio State is obvious.

Whether the Buckeyes will work to significantly change his body is yet to be seen, as he wasn't a part of the annual winter workouts and won't get that opportunity until 2022, but it's hard to imagine Ohio State bulking him up much beyond 277 pounds. Two of the bigger ends in recent memory, Jalyn Holmes and Jashon Cornell, checked in at 6-5 270 pounds and 6-3, 285 pounds, respectively, and both spent time at tackle in passing situations.

Chase Young was enormous, but even he checked in right around where Ohio State usually likes its ends: 6-5, 264 pounds. Tuimoloau's body type is a bit different - he possesses the frame to add muscle onto some very long arms without losing athleticism, which could make him the rare mold-breaker, but it's fair to assume that Ohio State isn't going to push him a whole lot higher than he already is. You can expect a post-college weight program Tuimoloau to become a bit more built, as all Buckeyes seem to, but any significant shifts in make-up are unlikely at best. So many of his strengths come from his build, and there's no good reason to mess with that to better fit him into an archetype.

As it comes to actual, on-field play, Tuimoloau is just so *advanced*. Especially when compared to most freshman ends. He has the best get-off of anyone in the class and possesses such a good understanding of his own positioning on the field, and how to use his strength to get to the ball carrier while fighting through blocks. A lot of his play against the run is so reminiscent of an athletic tackle, which, as you might imagine, isn't especially common among ends. If he can stack and shed against guards and centers, he can do it against tackles, meaning that he should be able to set one hell of an edge for Ohio State, creating nice clean lines for second-level defenders to the ball carrier.

It's hard not to love what he brings as a pass rusher too. Though he's not quite as quick as Sawyer and won't rack up as many sacks as his cohort, he has tremendous speed and bend for a player as big as he is, with an already fairly well-developed set of pass-rushing moves. His best work at Ohio State will likely come against the run and as a power rusher, and there's just no answer for that when you're pairing him with Sawyer. That's an All-American on either side of the line, with completely different skill sets that complement each other perfectly. Ohio State would be in very good hands if it started the two from day one, but even a year of waiting would be worth it to see the Tuimoloau-Sawyer pairing unleashed full-time. Though, I don't think it'll take that long.