

Ja'Had Carter, Josh Proctor, Malik Hartford Still Battling At Free Safety



Ohio State already knows that safeties Lathan Ransom and Sonny Styles will start at the bandit/strong safety and nickel, respectively, but the pair of defensive backs are still waiting to see who will line up alongside them this season in the secondary.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said Tuesday that safeties Ja'Had Carter, Josh Proctor and Malik Hartford – the latter a true freshman – will all see the field in the season opener at Indiana on Saturday as the trio continues to compete for the starting free safety role.

“Who’s going to get it? We’ve still got a couple of days of practice left,” Knowles said. “Let’s go out and see what you’re made of. Go out and get the position.”

Carter has been a presumed starter for Ohio State’s secondary since he transferred from Syracuse this offseason, though he lined up throughout the spring at nickel before switching to free safety during fall camp. Proctor, meanwhile, started at bandit last season before Ransom took over the job and had a limited role throughout the rest of the year.

While neither has done enough yet to claim the starting job, Knowles could envision both as the starting free safety for Ohio State this season.

“Josh has great closing speed and we know that he will be a factor in terms of run support and getting to the ball. He kind of brings a different element with the way he comes high, low, inside out,” he said. “Then Ja’Had, he’s he’s played a lot of football, so he’s coachable, he’s smart and he has experience.”

The surprise has been Hartford, who enrolled early at Ohio State this offseason and lost his black stripe in April ahead of the spring game. Carter and Proctor have a combined eight seasons of college football under their belts, but it has not stopped Hartford from making an early impression and making a push to see the field in his freshman season.

“(He’s) smart. (He’s got) football intelligence,” Knowles said. “I had a guy at Oklahoma State, Kolby Harvell-Peel, played for me as a freshman. There are guys that are rare. They come in, they just have an understanding of the game and they find a way to get around the ball. It jumps out at you.”

While Ohio State feels confident in the ability of either Carter, Hartford or Proctor to man the adjuster

this season, Knowles did admit that he does have some concern over the fact that a player has yet to separate himself as the starter.

“When you don’t have one particular guy that you’re, you know, ‘Hey, this is our dude,’ there’s always there’s always some thought behind it, there’s always some angst behind it,” he said. “You know, who’s it going to be? What’s this guy do well? What’s he do? How am I going to call it when he’s in there? What am I going to call when the other guy’s in there? So yeah, there’s something to that.”