

Johnson, Defensive Line Intend To Flex Depth, Play As One Unit In 2023



Entering the 2023 season, Ohio State's defensive line starters are all but solidified, with Michael Hall Jr., Ty Hamilton, Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau all expected to assume the majority of snaps on the Buckeyes' front four. The Buckeyes' rushing quartet have the potential to wreak havoc on opposing offenses this year, but defensive line and associate head coach Larry Johnson feels he will need to count on the entire unit if they intend to produce through the entire 13-game schedule.

"I think the biggest thing we've challenged our guys, is to really just (think), 'let's be part of a pack, let's be a part of a unit that does everything special,'" Johnson said on Thursday. "And I think that's the key. We're trying not to say that 'this guy has this skill, that skill.' How about we put all those skills together and go play as a unit, and try to become the best unit in college football."

Speaking in front of the media at the Woody Hayes Center on Thursday morning, Johnson emphasized the importance of having his entire group of pass rushers — both starters and reserves — healthy and fresh throughout the season. In order to do that, Johnson intends to rotate players throughout the season, which in his mind can prevent his unit from burning out.

"You can't go into a game and play a guy 90 plays and try to play a 16, 15-game schedule hoping he can survive, you can't do that," Johnson said. "He'll burn out at the end. He'll look good in the beginning and burn out."

"Certainly, I would like to see J.T. to stay on the field, I would like to see all those guys stay on the field for a long time," he continued. "But at some point during the season, when those plays started counting up, all of a sudden, now you have guys that can potentially get hurt, because you've played so many players. So that's the thing you have to watch."

Johnson said he intends to have his starters play 60-65 plays a game throughout the season, providing an avenue for the defensive line to establish their depth all season. In addition to Hall, Hamilton Sawyer and Tuimoloau, Ohio State also expects to count on defensive tackles Tyleik Williams, Jaden McKenzie and Tywone Malone, along with defensive ends Caden Curry and Kenyatta Jackson Jr., among others.

For Johnson, however, the delineation of reps will still need to be sorted out during fall camp, as they will have a better idea of who will assume more playing time as the regular season inches closer.

“Right now, it’s the evaluation period,” Johnson said. “We just started. We’re into these last two weeks, going into the first game. It really depends on how we develop and come along...We want to rotate, we want to stay fresh. Maybe (our starters) will have more plays this year, but that’s going to be determined once we start the season.”