

Knowles: Defense Accomplishing “More Than I Could Have Hoped For”



Ohio State is still several months out from seeing defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' new scheme in action, but early returns from the spring suggest that installation is going well.

Knowles - bringing his signature defense from Oklahoma State that features a 4-2-5 scheme and his hybrid linebacker/defensive end position - spoke to the media last Friday and said the team did a good job of picking things up through the spring, which included 14 practices and spring game.

"I think they were able to get into the heart of it and get excited about it and say, 'Okay, we can show a lot of different looks,' but it was easy for them to learn," he said. "It can be overwhelming in the beginning because it looks like a lot, but when you get into the nuts and bolts of it, they were able to follow along at a rapid pace. That's a credit to our players, too. They soak it up and they really wanted to learn."

Given that it took time for Knowles to build his defense at Oklahoma State - his fourth and final season with the Pokes last year saw his best defense hit the field - it was unknown how quickly he might get the Buckeyes up to speed.

Knowles - as well as head coach Ryan Day - will need to see the defense perform in the opener against Notre Dame on Sept. 3 before making any sweeping judgements, but the new era for Ohio State's defense is off to a positive start, as Knowles said the Buckeyes accomplished more in the spring than he could have hoped for.

"I think our players were very open to the process, very eager to learn, and they pick things up at a rapid pace," he said. "I was really impressed with the guys we have in (their) football intelligence."

The new-look defense will look to solve several issues from Ohio State's defense last season, including too much simplicity in the Buckeyes' coverages and looks, players seemingly unsure of what to do at times and a lack of adjustments in Ohio State's challenging games.

"I think the way we adjust is a trademark of what we do," Knowles said. "That if something's hurting us that we fix it. I think that's my job. I have to do that. We have a system. That's how we built it so that we can adjust when we have to adjust."

Several names have popped up throughout the spring as potential budding stars under Knowles, including defensive ends Caden Curry, Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau (and Mitchell Melton before his injury), and safeties Kourt Williams, Josh Proctor and Kye Stokes.

Regardless of who shines this upcoming season for Ohio State's defense, Knowles' only goal is putting them in a position to succeed.

"We have a philosophy of being creative, being different, showing different looks," he said. "That just gives our guys that extra step now, and we have great players, so all I'm trying to do is give them that extra step in the play to be able to succeed."