

Knowles Talks Three-Linebacker Look



Ineptitude isn't the only thing that defines Iowa's offense, ranked last in the nation in yards per game.

As long as Kirk Ferentz has coached the Hawkeyes, they've had schemes in their attack designed to get the ball downhill on running plays in old-school fashion. These looks, often involving multiple tight ends, call for a bigger box from opposing defenses.

That's why Ohio State turned to its three-linebacker the most it has this season against the Hawkeyes.

"We've been planning for this," Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said. "We have to morph the defense when it gets to big personnel and multiple tight ends and fullbacks."

In the majority of the packages it was third-year linebacker Cody Simon seeing the field for Ohio State. Simon picked up six tackles in his rotational usage against the Hawkeyes, third most on the team. He now has the fourth-most tackles for the team on the season, with 26 total.

"Cody is the guy," Knowles said. "He's earned that right by how he's practiced. It was good to see him get a significant role because I think he can add a lot to the defense when we face those kinds of teams."

Another option behind Simon moving forward is fifth-year Palaie Gaoteote IV, who recovered a fumble late in the contest. With Chip Trayanum moving from linebacker to running back, Gaoteote is a player who could be called upon, especially if an injury should happen to Simon or starting linebackers Tommy Eichenberg or Steele Chambers.

"Palaie has great athleticism," Knowles said. "He has linebacker instinct, I guess, too. Palaie, just (want him) to stay healthy right now. I just really want him to have a good week of practice, because I've always felt like he could emerge if he strung together some games and some weeks of practice of being healthy. He's just had a tough time of it."

The majority of three-linebacker sets Ohio State unveiled saw Simon come down to the line of

scrimmage, playing on the end alongside four defensive linemen with hands in the dirt.

Knowles has no aversion to playing a 4-3 with stacked linebackers, though. Much of it depends on the formation presented by the opposition.

“It just depends on what you’re facing and what you’re trying to do,” Knowles said. “You want to try not to be predictable. Sometimes you have to be based on what you’re getting and the opponent, but you’d like to be able to have both and there’s different reasons for it. But it really just depends on what you’re getting from the offense.”

While Penn State, Maryland, Indiana and Northwestern don’t run as many big personnel packages as Iowa, such a 4-3 could come in handy for the biggest game remaining on No. 2 OSU’s schedule: No. 4 Michigan.