

National Signing Day: Hearing From Ohio State's New Assistant Coaches



Ohio State head coach Ryan Day kept five coaches from Urban Meyer's staff on board with the Buckeyes, meaning he brought in five additional assistants as well. Those five new coaches were scheduled to meet with the assembled Ohio State media for the first time on National Signing Day, starting with co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison, who moved to Columbus from Michigan.

What follows will be a running selection of live updates from each coach.

Greg Mattison, Co-DC

- He noted he's fortunate to have spent time at "two of the greatest programs in the country," referring to Michigan and Ohio State.
- Mattison called co-coordinator Jeff Hafley "one of the best secondary coaches around. ... I've been so impressed with his knowledge of the back end."
- Mattison, who has spent plenty of time as a DL coach in addition to being a coordinator, said he'll help wherever he's needed, especially with the defensive line and linebackers.
- He said one of his key philosophies is to "run the defense that goes with your talent."
- Mattison said he would watch Ohio State's defensive line while at Michigan. Stressed that he has "the utmost respect" for what Larry Johnson has done with the Buckeyes.
- On five-star defensive end Zach Harrison, who Mattison also recruited at Michigan: "No. 1, great character. That's the first thing. No. 2, he's an unbelievable athlete to be that big and that strong."
- Mattison said Jim Harbaugh understood the draw to return to being a coordinator. He added that the "hardest thing was calling the players."

Jeff Hafley, Co-DC/Secondary Coach

- On how to balance scheme and talent: "We have talent here, so I think we've got to make the most of our talent. I think we have to make it easy for our players to play fast."
- Hafley said he's a "big believer in playing press, but I also believe you have to change it up." Made it clear that there will be more diversity in coverages going forward."
- He said he talked with Mattison before deciding to come to Ohio State just to make sure it was a good fit. Hafley said it's gone really well so far.
- On whether or not returning starters could get passed over: "The best guys are going to play, and I mean that. I've started free agents over first-round draft picks."
- Hafley said coaching NFL players isn't that different than coaching college athletes. It's still all about the relationship.
- He said the opportunity to coordinate was a big draw to come to Ohio State and leave the NFL, but he's had opportunities in the past. "I came here because this is a special place."
- Hafley stressed that the coaching staff will work on coaching the players to turn and look for the football in man coverage.

Mike Yurcich, QB Coach/Passing Game Coordinator

- He said he's focused on developing and learning Ohio State's offense right now. Also focused on bringing his past experience into the fold.
- He noted that it's important not to compare the 2019 offense to last season. The key is to maximize the personnel that is available now.
- Yurcich said his job is to "learn how the quarterbacks learn the best" as he builds a relationship with all of the signal callers on the roster. "You're just trying to get to know everybody and develop those relationships and it takes a lot of time."
- He said redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin is a "very accurate passer." Yurcich had involvement with Baldwin as a recruit while he was coaching at Oklahoma State.

Matt Barnes, ST Coordinator/Assistant Secondary Coach

- Barnes noted the tradition and championship aspirations as reasons he took a job at Ohio State. He also stressed that the Buckeyes do things "the right way," which has been a common theme among the new assistants.
- He said he wants to "continue to cultivate the importance of special teams." Noted that Ohio State has already been doing a great job of that and added that he'll continue to play the best players on special teams.
- Barnes said having a specified special teams coordinator allows him to dive in more fully with those units than if another assistant or the head coach was taking those responsibilities.

Al Washington, LBs Coach

- Washington on how he'll evaluate returning starters vs. backups: "You've got to give the kids a chance to prove themselves to you. ... My take has always been to evaluate the body of the work that you have and then consider what you're doing this year."
- Washington, who is a Columbus native who most recently coached at Michigan, admitted it was a tough decision when he opted to leave for Ohio State. "This is home for me, this is an unbelievable

situation and a program.” He said his knowledge of Ohio State and relationship with Ryan Day impacted the choice as well.

- On the defensive scheme: “What you can expect is an aggressive defense that’s going to play fast.”
- Washington noted he has “a ton of respect for Coach Harbaugh.” He said Harbaugh respected the decision.
- He called Harrison a “great kid.” Washington spent a lot of time with Harrison during the recruiting process. Washington admitted he was “bummed out” when Harrison picked the Buckeyes since he was still on staff at Michigan.
- Washington said Day is “very poised and he’s very in tune to the situation.”

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