

Observations On Defense From Ohio State Spring Practice No. 1

Ohio State opened its spring football season on Monday with a morning practice, the entirety of which was made available to the media. While much of the practice was spent on individual drills, and while there was no hitting allowed, there was still plenty to note as the Buckeyes kickoff the spring season.

The Buckeyes had several players working off to the side of the field away from the rest of the team, and confirmed some limited participation in a status report. On the defense, cornerback Cameron Brown, linebacker Baron Browning, defensive end Jonathon Cooper, safety Ronnie Hickman, defensive lineman Jaden McKenzie, defensive tackle Taron Vincent and cornerback Shaun Wade were all listed as limited.

Only one defender was listed as unavailable: Josh Proctor, who was dressed but did not participate in drills. Linebacker Craig Young seemed to be dinged up very early in the practice and spent some time stretching on the sidelines.

Hickman, McKenzie and Vincent were all on-and-off the field as well.

Of the action on the field, the star of the day was defensive back Sevyn Banks, who snagged two interceptions off of Justin Fields, and played almost exclusively as an outside corner with the first team. The cornerback on the opposite side of the field with the first team was usually Tyreke Johnson.

The Buckeyes stayed true to new defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs' word that the defense would remain reliant on one high safety. That was the lone look that the defense showed in team portions of the practice, with the high safety rotating frequently. Marcus Hooker repped with the first team there, followed by true freshman Kourt Williams and Kevin Dever. Hickman split time between safety and nickel, rotating in the slot with Marcus Williamson and Bryson Shaw.

Noticeably not with the safeties was Craig Young, who is listed as a linebacker on the roster and appears to be moving to that spot full-time. Young's shift wasn't the only one on the defense. Cade Stover has moved to tight end from defensive end, and former tight end Cormontae Hamilton worked exclusively with the defensive line.

On the line, the first group was typically comprised of four of Zach Harrison, Tyler Friday, Javontae Jean-Baptiste, Tommy Togiai, Haskell Garrett and Tyreke Smith. Harrison didn't play with the first team early in the scrimmage portion of the day, but did join the group later on.

At linebacker, Pete Werner, Tuf Borland, and Justin Hilliard spent the majority of their time as the first team group, backed up by Dallas Gant, Teradja Mitchell and K'Vaughan Pope.

While Banks was the star of the defensive backfield, he wasn't the only new contributor that flashed his potential. Hooker broke hard from his deep safety zone on a Fields pass and jumped the route for a very impressive interception. Freshman cornerback Ryan Watts had an interception of his own too, though it was a case of being in the right place at the right time above anything else. It was a bit of a harder day for Shaw, who was beaten on a Demario McCall touchdown reception near the end of practice.

McCall also led the way on punt return, followed by Garrett Wilson and Mookie Cooper. None of the three had a ton of chances to flash their hands, because just about every punt went directly into the indoor facility's ceiling.

Overall, it was a spring practice. There was plenty of sloppy play, and with several expected starters held out, there isn't a ton that can be taken away about how the depth chart stands right now. Still, there were bursts of very obvious talent from quite a few young players, and some slight shifts in personnel that could mean quite a bit for the Buckeyes when fall practice rolls around after a long summer.