

Ohio State Defensive Line Shows Strides During Spring



Across the past three seasons, questions have surrounded the Ohio State defensive line and position coach Larry Johnson as the unit had seen diminishing returns after an incredible run during the 2010s.

The Buckeyes have seen sack numbers dwindle in the years since the days of the Bosa brothers and Chase Young, and the overall reputation gained by the unit during the 2010s has seen a steep decline in the 2020s. But, Ohio State's defensive front appears to be back on the right track after an encouraging spring camp by Johnson's unit.

Ohio State's annual spring game on Saturday helped paint a picture of the strides the defensive line has made, as the unit racked up five sacks while placing quarterbacks Kyle McCord and Tristan Gebbia under near-constant pressure throughout the contest.

"I feel like we have the right people in place in terms of starters or the first group," Day said after the spring game. "Those guys have to play great, that's important. As you take the next step in your progression, it's one thing to be a starter, it's another thing to be a difference maker. I think we have quite a few guys that can be difference makers (on the defensive line)."

Ohio State certainly hasn't lacked star power up front in recent seasons, with Jack Sawyer — who manned the hybrid defensive end/linebacker "Jack" position last season — and J.T. Tuimoloau set to man the edges for the second-consecutive season. Both Sawyer and Tuimoloau joined the Buckeyes as five-star recruits, and have shown flashes of their potential throughout their first two seasons with the programs — with Sawyer tying for a team-best 4 1/2 sacks, while Tuimoloau collected 3 1/2 quarterback takedowns.

Although Sawyer and Tuimoloau headline Ohio State's efforts on the edge, the Buckeyes have also seen encouraging returns from second-year ends Kenyatta Jackson, Caden Curry and Omari Abor, with Jackson and Curry each picking up a sack during the spring game.

On the interior, Ohio State also has a run-stuffer in Tyleik Williams and a solid pass-rusher in Mike Hall Jr., while Ty Hamilton serves as a best-of-both-worlds option. While that trio largely took center stage last season, the emergence of Hero Kanu during the spring has been a welcome development, and he capped off camp with two tackles for loss and a sack in the spring game. Williams and Hamilton each added a sack during the contest.

While the Buckeyes' defensive front enjoyed a strong spring, Day emphasized that the unit needs to continue that development into the summer and fall.

"We like to play a lot of depth there, it's a long season, so that's an area that we have to continue to see improvement," Day said. "Guys like Kenyatta Jackson stepped up, and we need more and more of those guys to do that on the defensive line."