

Ohio State Football Outlook: The Linebacker Depth Chart



With the Buckeyes' spring game in the rear-view mirror, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and his staff will enter the summer with a barebones outline for their roster's depth chart in 2022.

Because the program doesn't release an official depth chart, Buckeye Sports Bulletin compiled observations and resources to build its first version of the Ohio State starting offensive, defensive and special teams players. We will also address the second-string and third-string Buckeyes at each position.

Consider this article — and the following articles until May 16 — as you would an NFL mock draft. Ohio State's depth chart will undoubtedly change between May and August. Injuries, the transfer portal, and other factors will cause roster movement. For now, here's BSB's first version of the 2022 depth chart projection based on what we've seen and heard around the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and Ohio Stadium this spring.

LINEBACKERS

Starters: Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers

Backups: Teradja Mitchell and Chip Trayanum

Others Available: Cody Simon, C.J. Hicks, Palaie Gaoteote, Reid Carrico and Gabe Powers

For the Jim Knowles defense to include three safeties it must take away one linebacker, leaving the Buckeyes with only two spots for nine scholarship players. This season, Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers will play a significant role as starters or role players, and right now we have them as the frontrunners for the starting jobs.

Behind Eichenberg and Chambers will come a similar combination of athleticism and talent in Teradja Mitchell and Chip Trayanum. However, there likely won't be clear-cut backups in the linebacker room this season. Instead, the Buckeyes will lean toward a rotation behind their starters, looking to add depth with Cody Simon, C.J. Hicks and Palaie Gaoteote when applicable. Reid Carrico will still look to develop

in his second season, while Gabe Powers will likely be a special teams player in his first year on campus.

TOMMY EICHENBERG

HEIGHT: 6-2

WEIGHT: 235

HOMETOWN: CLEVELAND, OHIO

RECRUITING: FOUR-STAR FROM ST. IGNATIUS HIGH SCHOOL

Eichenberg's 17-tackle Rose Bowl performance was seen mostly as a fluke when it happened, but we fear that does not offer the Cleveland native the credit he deserves. Eichenberg improved in every game last season — there is a Grand Canyon level gorge between where he started 2021 and where he ended it. That kind of growth will pay dividends when head coach Ryan Day and Knowles draw up their depth chart during and after fall camp.

Currently, Day and Knowles could not be higher on Eichenberg. They think he can be more than a situational linebacker and want to see him take a firm grasp of his redefined role as a redshirt junior. He has the range to play against run-heavy and pass-heavy offenses, making him a more versatile player than many think.

STEELE CHAMBERS

HEIGHT: 6-1

WEIGHT: 232

HOMETOWN: ROSSWELL, GA.

RECRUITING: FOUR-STAR (RB) FROM BLESSED TRINITY CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Chambers proved himself to be a sound tackler in his first year at linebacker. His athleticism and speed helped him stand out among other linebackers, and the former defensive coaching regime put significant trust in him as the season went on. That wasn't the case at the beginning of 2021, though. Chambers started a little slow, but he added more strength from week-to-week — a trend continued into the offseason.

Chambers will be the starter at will linebacker in 2022. He seems like the one sure-fire player at the position. He made his home on defense a year ago, and we don't think he'll fall down the depth chart like he did at running back. Linebacker is a natural fit for the Roswell, Ga., native, and he's making that clear each time he takes the field.

TERADJA MITCHELL

HEIGHT: 6-2

WEIGHT: 239

HOMETOWN: VIRGINIA BEACH, VA.

RECRUITING: FOUR-STAR FROM BISHOP SULLIVAN HIGH SCHOOL

While tempted to put Simon as a backup linebacker, the junior didn't fully participate in spring practices which gives Mitchell a slight edge for now. Knowles will play a true 4-3 defense against offenses that utilize bigger personnel, so either linebacker will earn their playing time — it's just a matter of who will get more than the other.

Mitchell is a former four-star, No. 1 inside linebacker recruit and top 20 prospect in the class of 2018. The graduate played special teams for three seasons before starting the first few games last season. However, as Eichenberg, Simon and Chambers emerged, Mitchell took a backseat and received little playing time down the stretch.

In 2022, Mitchell will run it back as an inside-the-tackles player on defense. Most of his reps will likely come in the 4-3 package as the mike linebacker against offenses with multiple tight ends (also called 12 personnel). He'll be a captain again because of his great leadership in the locker room. Hopefully, those off-the-field qualities can translate to on-the-field production in his fifth year.

CHIP TRAYANUM

HEIGHT: 5-11

WEIGHT: 227

HOMETOWN: AKRON, OHIO

RECRUITING: FOUR-STAR (RB) FROM ARCHBISHOP HOBAN AND ARIZONA STATE TRANSFER

Trayanum looks the part of a collegiate linebacker. He's a little undersized in height, but he makes up for it in weight. His 227-pound frame combined with his quickness, speed and strength help him stand out among others in the room. A former high school linebacker, Trayanum did a little bit of everything for his team, but he did all that three years ago.

In his first season, it's fair to temper expectations — mostly because it's hard to imagine Ohio State catches lighting in a bottle with running backs transitioning to linebacker (i.e., Chambers). If it takes time for Trayanum to find his footing, that would make sense. Give the Arizona State transfer some time to adjust to life in the Big Ten. We might be surprised with the results when the season ends.

OTHERS AVAILABLE

Cody Simon, C.J. Hicks, Palaie Gaoteote, Reid Carrico and Gabe Powers

Simon needs to get healthy, and he will be before the 2022 season starts. When he regains his strength and brings his body up to speed, he will be the first rotational linebacker off the bench against Notre Dame, Arkansas State and Toledo. After Simon, though, things get pretty interesting.

Knowles talks up Hicks for his quick twitch and short-field quickness. It appears that the defensive coordinator will find one or more ways to put the former five-star linebacker on the field. He's the first linebacker since Raekwon McMillan to have the kind of reputation and profile entering their first

season. His maturity and athleticism will be on full display when he takes the field. How consistently he plays between the white lines is still up for debate.

Gaoteote was a significant transfer win for Ohio State last season. His fight for eligibility was also a major talking point in Columbus media as the program patiently waited for the NCAA's ruling on his immediate playing time after leaving Southern California. Gaoteote has the versatility to play each of the linebacker positions, but he'll need to be more consistent for the defensive coaching staff to trust him with enough playing time to make an impact.

Carrico and Powers look to be special teams players in 2022, and that's okay. The former is a versatile linebacker that could emerge as a sam linebacker in the 4-3 set, and the latter needs to grow into his frame and develop into a collegiate linebacker. Carrico is only a sophomore and Powers is a freshman, meaning there's plenty of time before they're expected to step into significant roles at Ohio State.