

Ryan Day Praises Larry Johnson, Sees Defensive Line Coach Playing Large Role In Program's Future



Amidst the hectic hours of Tuesday's early signing period, multiple rumors and reports were swirling that suggested Buford, Ga. five-star defensive linemen Eddrick Houston (6-3, 295) — the nation's 26th overall player — was leaning towards flipping his allegiance from Ohio State and to Oregon.

With Ohio State holding just one other defensive line commit at the time — that being Stafford (Va.) three-star Eric Mensah (6-3, 290), and the program already serving as victim to a big-time defensive lineman flip last month when Chicago St. Ignatius five-star left the Buckeyes for Miami (Fla.), most of the attention on head coach Ryan Day's Tuesday press conference was centered around the 72-year-old assistant's ability to recruit — and most importantly retain — recruits.

Contrary to initial reports however, Houston stuck with Johnson and the Buckeyes, providing a significant boost to Johnson's recruiting class that allowed Day to breathe a sigh of relief, and praise his defensive line coach for his efforts.

"Larry worked hard on this one," Day said. "It was a long process to get to signing day here, but we identified him early as somebody who was a difference-maker. And again, I give Larry a lot of credit for the relationships he built down there."

Before he even knew about the Buckeyes securing Houston, Day still praised Johnson for his ability to recruit and develop young defensive line talent. When asked if he feels Johnson's age may negatively impact him in his recruiting efforts, Day said his coach still brings a youthful energy — along with some useful wisdom — to the coaching staff that permeates through the Woody Hayes Athletic Center every day.

"I've had a number of questions about Larry Johnson, about whether or not he's retiring, it's funny guys have brought that up over the years in recruiting," Day said. "But he's young, in terms of his approach every day. He has a lot of energy, and he wants to continue to coach, and the guys in the room love him."

"He has a lot of wisdom to him," he added. "So when you're going into a room every day with

somebody, you're counting on them to mentor your young man. I think that's where families feel comfortable with that. When they hand their son over to Larry Johnson, they know what they're getting. They're going to get someone who's going to pour into him in all areas."

Johnson's efforts during these past few recruiting cycles has also pleased Day. He said — even before Houston news — that he feels his coach has been able to build and sustain a formidable defensive line group in the trenches by successfully recruiting throughout the nation.

"I think so," Day said when asked if he was pleased with how Johnson has constructed his defensive line. "When you look at our roster, just across the board on where our guys are from, we're looking from coast to coast. You look at our D-line now, you've got a guy from Germany, a guy from Seattle, you've got guys from across the country. So we're looking for the best we can possibly get."

Day said that all of these factors have made him believe that Johnson is here to stay at Ohio State, where he will continue to play a significant role in the development and construction of the team's defense for the foreseeable future. This belief was expressed in his blunt answer when he was asked if he expects Johnson to return to 2024, to which Day simply responded: "Yes."