

Ohio State Linebackers Coach Al Washington Discusses Returning Starters, Emerging Players



Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington spoke to members of the media about his talented position group, including returning starters and exciting up-and-coming 'backers.

- We emphasize tackling every year. It's something we obviously have to do a good job of, but it's a challenge when we don't have the pads on. But we've done a good job of finding ways to make an emphasis as best as we can without pads. Our guys have approached it like pros.
- No. 1 is your eyes. We talk about 'eyes up.' You have to keep your eyes up to make the play. Your feet are important too. If you see guys who miss tackles, it's really about a weak base or bad eyes.
- You just give people roles. You have to give a player a role and a focus and give him the opportunity to exercise that. We are a deep group, but we are going to need more than three or four. You never know what can happen with this whole situation we're in. This period has brought us closer and everyone feels like they can impact in their own way.
- This particular group is one of the more special groups I've been around. This is one of the most adverse times a college athlete could face, and these guys have responded well with leadership. Our mentality this offseason is focused on improving.
- Guys like Teradja and Dallas are doing tremendously well. They are having a very strong camp so far. K'Vaughn Pope and Craig Young have done a great job as well. And I'm really excited about Cody Simon and Mitchell Melton. They're going to be special players. They're both very tough and they love football.
- Dallas Gant is a skilled inside 'backer. He has position flexibility, he can play Mike and Will for us. His value is obviously to contribute more minutes but also to provide us with that versatility.
- Teradja Mitchell is an explosive player and a very passionate player. Those type of guys, we can find ways to get them closer to the ball and around the action.
- K'Vaughn Pope is very athletic, and very athletic in space. I don't want to give too many details of scheme, but we have to put them in a position to play to their strength.
- With Baron's athleticism, he can play inside and outside.
- As a defense, we're trying to play toward our players' strengths more.
- We do have that depth and we have guys with a variety of different skillsets. So, we can match up better and put our guys in positions to use their strengths.

- Experience is always helpful, but to be honest, football is not football until there are pads. You can look good in rehearsal, but you've got to go out and play.
- The Sam position was an inside 'backer at times. Pete has such a broad skillset that allows him to do it all.
- We're doing a drill that's an open-field tackling drill that has nothing to do with tackling but more with tracking. It's all about timing up where the ball carrier is and where the contact has to happen.
- It helps that we had almost everyone last year. We have a shared voice in the importance of proper tackling.
- This whole period is funny, I almost feel closer to the guys. The amount of time we've spent on Zoom and on the phone because we can't see them. It's not about being more comfortable, I feel more aware. And our bond is stronger, which is important when it comes to those pressure moments.
- There's two types of leaders, some that are more quiet and some that are more vocal. Naturally, he's more on the action side and he's a quiet guy. He's taken the approach of being more vocal and willing to speak up if he sees something that's not up to standard. He commands respect from everybody. And I think he's taken more guys under his wing. He's improving in every way.
- I'm really excited about Justin Hilliard and what he's done. We're expecting more out of him.
- This season's on now, but it's time to play. Once they gave us a start date, it was time to roll.
- Tommy Eichenberg was banged up a year ago, and he's doing a really, really fine job.

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