

Ohio State's Wide Receiver, Cornerback Rooms Making Each Other Better In Spring Practice



Throughout this offseason, the old adage “iron sharpens iron” has often been used to describe the competition present within Ohio State’s locker room in 2024, one that is filled this season with supreme NFL-ready talent at many different positions.

Perhaps no pair of positional groups fits this billing more than the Buckeyes’ wide receiver and cornerback rooms, both of which are filled with a unique mix of established veterans and sprouting underclassmen who line up against each other in practice every day.

When asked about the dynamic between the wide receiver and cornerback rooms after Thursday’s practice at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, both wide receivers coach Brian Hartline and cornerbacks/secondary coach Tim Walton raved about the fierce competition happening each practice between both positional groups, a constant back-and-forth that they think can turn each group into one of the nation’s best come fall.

“They have the best group in the country that you’re going against every day,” Walton said. “So you have to bring it every day. We have a great cornerback room. They have a great receiver room...So when you’re out there going against them, it gets deep. So you have to be ready.

“It’s a lot of fun,” Hartline added. “They win, we win, it’s back and forth. It’s a heavyweight fight daily.”

While Ohio State is no stranger to competition practice, with the school constantly producing and developing NFL-caliber talent throughout the Ryan Day era, Walton said that the battle between his cornerbacks and Hartline’s wide receivers has particularly picked up this season.

He believes that this has occurred because the talent gap between the wideouts and cornerbacks has evened out across these last few seasons, creating a competitive environment where more developed cornerbacks such as Denzel Burke, Davison Igbinosun and Jermaine Mathews Jr., can now hold their own against the likes of Hartline’s stable of elite talent, which this season includes Emeka Egbuka, Brandon Inniss, Carnell Tate and true freshman Jeremiah Smith.

This is something that Walton thinks has not been able to transpire in previous seasons, with Ohio State’s elite wideout rooms of the past — ones that were filled with future or current NFL players

Marvin Harrison Jr., Egbuka, and Jaxon Smith-Njigba — often getting the better of the Buckeyes' cornerbacks.

"It's balanced out a little bit now, that (creates) great competition," Walton said. "We go against the best receivers in college football. So that helps escalate your growth process. Because if you don't figure it out real fast, you get embarrassed. But what happened with that, our guys started competing. Our guys started growing. Our guys got better. And now it's evened out."

Hartline and Walton also acknowledged that this fierce competition can also benefit them in the world of recruiting, where many of their high school targets can observe the two units battling it out during practice on their visits to Ohio State. Hartline said that recruits have been impressed with the way the receivers and cornerbacks have played in practice, with many telling the wide receivers coach that the competition is unlike what they have seen in other schools.

"It's pretty cool, because when guys do come visit as recruits, they see (the competition)," Hartline said. "And that's one of the first things they say, is 'The chippiness, the competitiveness, is really different.'"

Regardless of the extent of the trash talk between them at practice, Walton said the two units share a great mutual respect and admiration for one another, a unique combination of respect and fierce competition that he thinks can put both groups in prime position to dominate in 2024.

"Those guys — on both sides of the ball — care about each other," Walton said. "It's great competition, and they all really, really close. It's the stuff that gets us better that will prepare us for Saturday."