

OSU Already Has A Ready-Made Candidate To Replace Smith



Ohio State coaching intern Brian Hartline. (Credit: Josh Winslow/BSB)

Ohio State fired wide receivers coach Zach Smith on Monday, and head coach Urban Meyer wasn't ready to name a successor at Big Ten Media Days on Tuesday in Chicago. That's like to be just a matter

of time, though, with a final decision likely to come down by the end of the week.

It might just be a formality at this point, anyway, considering the Buckeyes have a ready-made candidate to replace Smith already on campus - one with the playing resume that would suggest he could end up as a high-level coach.

Former Buckeye wide receiver Brian Hartline has been back in Columbus for two years, working with the team's wide receivers as a coaching intern. On Monday, reports surfaced saying that Hartline was set to take over for Smith in an interim capacity, and - if that is the case - the receivers already on the roster would be comfortable with the move.

A key reason for that comfort level is Hartline's familiarity with the team, in addition to his experience in the NFL, where he spent seven years with the Miami Dolphins and Cleveland Browns.

On Tuesday in Chicago, fifth-year senior wide receiver Parris Campbell, a team captain for the Buckeyes, stressed that he didn't yet know who was replacing Smith, but noted that Hartline has already brought a lot to the table.

"It's been great working with him," Campbell said. "He's a great guy, he's played at the next level and also dominated at the next level, so it's been great."

Hartline played for Jim Tressel at Ohio State from 2005-08, catching 90 passes for 1,429 yards and 12 touchdowns in the process. He was selected by Miami in the fourth round of the 2009 NFL draft, going on to play six seasons with the Dolphins and one with the Browns. In the pros, he totaled 344 receptions for 4,766 yards and 14 touchdowns, including 1,000-plus-yard seasons in 2012 and 2013.

Success as a player in the NFL, though, doesn't always translate to success as a coach, something Meyer mentioned at media days as well. That said, Hartline isn't just another NFL product - he's been on campus as a player and as a coach, and the receivers at Ohio State know what he brings to the table. Especially with the season fast approaching - fall camp is set to begin Aug. 3 - the familiarity Hartline has would be a big boost in the transition.

"Just because he's someone who's already familiar with the way we go about things, familiar with our culture," Campbell said. "He's been great, he's adapted to us, he's been there for two years and we've grown our relationship, everyone has, with him."

If Hartline is the man to replace Smith - at least in the short term - he'd provide stability and familiarity for the wide receivers, which represent the most experienced position group on the team. Campbell, Terry McLaurin and Johnnie Dixon - three of the top six receivers from last season - are all fifth-year seniors, while the other three are juniors. That experience from a playing stand point coupled with a familiarity with their new coach would allow the group to enter the season without missing a beat if Hartline does, in fact, get the job.

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