

Top Prep Linebacker Becomes Star Running Back In '91

Styles Increases College Stock On Offense

By Steve Helwag

Prior to his final season at Farrell (Pa.) High School, Lorenzo Styles was touted as a can't-miss product at linebacker.

Now, after rushing for more than 1,300 yards in his first season at tailback, colleges are looking at the 6-2, 225-pound senior as a potential force on offense as well.

"First of all, all of the preseason hype on Lorenzo was on his being a linebacker," said Farrell coach Lou Falconi. "Since we moved him to tailback, people are taking another look at him."

Styles, though, maintains he would like to play defense at the college level.

"I think in college I'd like to switch to an outside linebacker because I think I fit that position pretty good," he said. "I play the run a little better than I play the pass. I think I do a pretty decent job of stepping up in the holes and cutting off the run."

"I know I may need to put on a little bit more bulk and maybe get taller, but I think I can fit in some place."

Styles certainly played tall last sea-

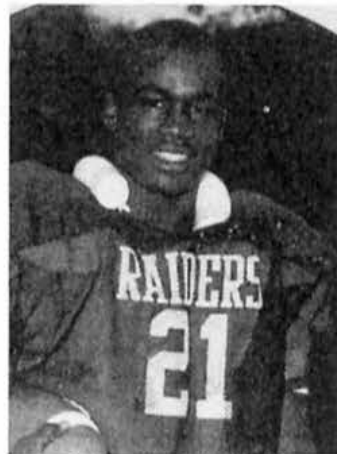
son. He tallied a whopping 97 solo tackles from his inside linebacker spot to lead Farrell to a 14-1 record and a Class A (small school) state runner-up finish last year. He also had seven touchdowns receiving at tight end on offense.

"We played for the state championship and Lorenzo was certainly a big factor in that," Falconi said. "This year, we lost 21 seniors (to graduation) and only had three starters back."

"But Lorenzo has managed to be the catalyst that put us back on track. He's one of our co-captains and a real team leader. He's continued to play well defensively, and we have really appreciated what he's done since we switched him to tailback."

Through the first nine games, Farrell was 8-1 and had earned a repeat trip to the Class A playoffs. Styles had accumulated 115 total tackles, including 71 solos. On offense, he had rushed for 1,359 yards on 136 carries for 21 touchdowns.

Falconi said Styles could make an impact on either side of the ball at the collegiate level.



Lorenzo Styles

"It will be up to whoever he goes to," he said. "Lorenzo has always said he wants to play defense. He has it all. He has size and strength. He can bench press 340 pounds. He has speed. We've clocked him at 4.6 and as low as 4.58 in the 40-yard dash. And he's got great hands. He's got it all rolled into one."

"I call him the best player I've ever coached because he can play any position on the field and still be the best player on the field at any given time."

National recruiting expert Tom Lemming named Styles to his preseason All-American team, calling him "a tremendous prospect" and "a devastating inside linebacker with great tools and work habits."

When asked to compare Styles to some familiar college or pro players, Falconi replied, "He looks a little like Eric Dickerson, and he runs the ball like Earl Campbell. He is kind of a combination of those two."

Styles, though, is content to create his own style.

"I haven't really been compared that much to anybody," he said. "I really just want to be my own player and stand out for myself."

Styles, who holds a 2.40 grade-point average in school, said he is considering a number of colleges, but Ohio State and Pittsburgh seem to be at the top of his list right now.

"I really haven't narrowed it down yet, but I'd say my top two right now are Ohio State and Pittsburgh," he said. "Right now, I'm just looking for a school where I can fit in with their program and also get the best education possible. I think I want to be a business major right now."

Farrell, Pa., is located about 10 miles east of the Ohio-Pennsylvania border and is almost equidistant from Youngstown and Pittsburgh.

"There are a lot of Pitt fans and a lot of Ohio State fans in this area," Falconi said. "I think his final decision may come down to the closeness of those two schools. Pitt and Ohio State are at the top of his list right now, but I think he may also be interested in Nebraska, Colorado and, now, maybe Oklahoma and Michigan State."

Styles is familiar with Ohio State and the central Ohio area, having moved from Columbus just two years ago.

"I played as a freshman at Walnut Ridge High School and then I played with Columbus Independence as a sophomore," he said. "I moved here before my junior year."

He said he is familiar with former Independence star and current OSU sophomore safety Roger Harper.

"He left Independence the year before I came," Styles said. "We've talked a few times."

Styles said he is planning on visiting Ohio State, but he hasn't scheduled it yet. "I'm going to play basketball this season and I'll have to work around that," he said.

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THE STYLES FILE

NAME — Lorenzo Styles

HIGH SCHOOL — Farrell, Pa.

POSITION — Inside linebacker, running back

HEIGHT, WEIGHT — 6-2, 225 pounds

BENCH PRESS — 320 pounds

40-YARD DASH TIME — 4.5 seconds

GRADE-POINT AVERAGE — 2.40

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS — Has yet to take either ACT or SAT

VITAL STATISTICS — Was Farrell's leading tackler last year with 97 solos. He also scored seven touchdowns as a tight end. This year, he was named a preseason All-American by national recruiting expert Tom Lemming and has responded by accumulating 71 solo tackles and 115 total tackles through his team's first nine games. He also moved to running back on offense, where he had rushed for 1,359 yards on 136 carries (9.9-yard average) and 21 touchdowns.

COACH'S COMMENT — "He has it all. He has size and strength. He can bench press 340 pounds. We've clocked him at 4.6 and as low as 4.58 in the 40. I call him the best player I've ever coached because he can play any position on the field and still be the best player on the field at any given time. Since we've moved him to tailback, people are taking another look at him." — Farrell High School head coach Lou Falconi

HOBBIES — Basketball

SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN — Ohio State, Pittsburgh and several others including Nebraska, Colorado, Oklahoma and Michigan State

Linebacker Chooses OSU Over Several Other Top Programs

Test Performance Makes Styles Prouddest

By Mark Rea

Lorenzo Styles has just about done it all at Farrell (Pa.) High School.

A multisport star for Farrell, Styles made nearly 250 tackles in his last two seasons and rushed for more than 1,000 yards in 1991 as a fullback. On the basketball court, he averaged 18 points and 12 rebounds per game.

But Styles' biggest accomplishment at Farrell, and the one of which he is most proud, did not come on the playing field. It came in the classroom.

"Of all the things he's accomplished here, I don't think I have ever seen him more proud than the day he received his test score," said Farrell athletic director Chuck Branca.

"I remember he was at basketball practice, and I came in and he ran up to me with that score. He acted just like a kid at Christmas."

Styles had scored 720 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and was thereby eligible to play college football as a freshman. Several weeks later, he decided that he would wear an Ohio State uniform.

"I was very happy to get the SAT behind me," Styles said. "That took a lot of the pressure off me. Then I could decide

which school was best for me rather than wondering whether or not I was going to be able to get in."

Styles was one of approximately 18 players who visited the OSU campus during the weekend of Jan. 10-11. Half of those players issued verbal commitments to the Buckeyes.

"To tell you the truth, I was kind of surprised when he came back from Ohio State and told me he had committed," said Farrell head coach Lou Falconi. "I knew that he had some interest in Miami (Fla.) and Nebraska and that he was scheduled to visit both of those places."

"But I also knew that he was interested in Ohio State from the very beginning. So I guess you could say I was surprised at the timing of the announcement, but not really at the announcement itself."

Styles said that he simply wanted to visit the OSU campus for himself.

"It was great," he said. "They talked about football a little bit and the great tradition. Then we also got to see the facilities and we talked to the academic advisers."

"I liked the fact that they didn't only talk about athletics. I was looking for a



Lorenzo Styles

program where I felt I fit in, but I was also looking to get the best education possible. I think that Ohio State gave me the best of all of those things."

Styles had always had an affection for the Buckeyes. He spent some time growing up in central Ohio and attended his first two years of high school in Columbus.

His freshman year was spent at Walnut Ridge and he was a sophomore at Independence High School one year after Roger Harper left there to become a defensive back at Ohio State.

Falconi said that he has never coached a better player than Styles in his 12 seasons at Farrell.

"I refer to him sometimes as a player-coach," Falconi said. "He's very strong, quick and had great natural athletic abilities, and he uses those abilities in an intelligent way."

"I call him the best player I've ever coached because he can play any position on the field and still be the best player on the field at any given time."

Last season, Styles played inside linebacker and registered 105 tackles,

10 for loss, and broke up four passes. He also caught 13 passes for 212 yards at tight end. Six of his 13 receptions went for touchdowns.

This season, while still manning his linebacker position and upping his tackles total to 140 with 12 sacks included, Styles switched to tailback and bulled his way for more than 1,700 yards and 23 touchdowns.

In 1990, Styles helped Farrell to a 14-1 record and a Class A (small school) state runner-up finish. This past season, despite losing 21 seniors to graduation, Farrell returned to the state playoffs and Styles was responsible for the return in no small measure.

"We played for the state championship last year and Lorenzo was certainly a big factor in that," Falconi said. "This year, we had only three starters back, but Lorenzo was the catalyst that put us back on track."

"He was one of our co-captains and a real team leader. He continued to play well defensively and we really appreciated what he did when we switched him to tailback."

The 6-2, 225-pounder said that he enjoyed running the ball as a senior but would be happy to concentrate on defense in college.

"I'd like to be an outside linebacker in college because I think I fit that position pretty well," Styles said. "I play the run a little better than I play the pass. I think I do a pretty decent job of stepping up in the holes and cutting off the run."

"I know I may need to put on a little bit more bulk and maybe get taller, but I think I can fit in some place on defense."

Styles runs the 40-yard dash in 4.6 seconds and Falconi said he has been timed as fast as 4.58.

Most of the college scouts were recruiting him as a linebacker. He earned pre- and postseason prep All-American honors from national recruiting expert Tom Lemming and was named to *The Associated Press'* Class AA-A all-state team in Pennsylvania.

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THE STYLES FILE

NAME — Lorenzo Styles
HIGH SCHOOL — Farrell, Pa.
POSITION — Linebacker
HEIGHT, WEIGHT — 6-2, 225 pounds
BENCH PRESS — 350 pounds
40-YARD DASH TIME — 4.6 seconds
GRADE-POINT AVERAGE — 2.30

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS — Scored 720 on the SAT
VITAL STATISTICS — Earned all-state recognition after helping Farrell make a return trip to the state playoffs in 1991 despite losing all but three starters from the 1990 squad. Registered 140 tackles and 12 sacks this season as a linebacker and also accounted for more than 1,700 yards and 23 TDs after switching from tight end to tailback. Has been timed in the 40 as fast as 4.58 seconds. Former resident of central Ohio area, played freshman football at Columbus Walnut Ridge and as a sophomore at Columbus Independence.

COACH'S COMMENT — "I think Lorenzo is a tremendous player. In my 12 seasons here, I don't think we've ever had a better one. We refer to him as a player-coach. I call him the best player I have ever coached because he can play any position on the field and still be the best player on the field at any given time. I think Ohio State has recruited a top-quality player." — Farrell High School head coach Lou Falconi.

HOBBIES — Basketball, being with friends

SCHOOLS INTERESTED IN — Selected Ohio State over Nebraska, Miami (Fla.) and Pittsburgh

That's The Way Teammates 'Affectionately' Refer To Star Linebacker

Is Styles Wacko, Bizarre Or Just Plain Nuts?

By JEFF RAPP
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer



I LIKE YOUR STYLES — Ohio State middle linebacker Lorenzo Styles (90), shown here last season against Northwestern, is one of the candidates for this year's Butkus Award. Styles led the Buckeyes in tackles in 1993 and again in the Pigskin Classic.

Move over, "Big Daddy."

The days of hip-toss tackles, blind-side hits, bone-crunching stops, staredowns and a lot of grunts and groans are not over. They're just shifting to another force of intimidation.

Enforcer Dan Wilkinson may be gone, but middle linebacker Lorenzo Styles is back and ready to torment.

"It seems like Ohio State always has that one guy on defense every year that's a little wacko. He's that guy," quarterback Bobby Hoying said of Styles.

"Just throwing seven on seven out here this summer, he's trying to get in people's heads. He's trying to get in my brother's head in practice now. He's a guy you like to have out there. He makes practice interesting and he makes going against the defense a lot of fun for us.

"I would have to say he's pretty much nuts."

Many Buckeye teammates concur, but none of them have tried to put Styles in a rubber room yet. Besides, one-on-one conversations with Styles give no hint of his on-field demeanor, especially because of his modest goals.

"Basically, my focus this year is to go out and have a solid season and do whatever I have to do to help the team win," he whispers, barely audible over his teammates' yelling in the background.

Fullback Alex Rodriguez, a converted linebacker, said Styles' personality is a dichotomy.

"I guess any linebacker at this level has to be a little bizarre, a little over-enthusiastic, and Lorenzo is no exception," Rodriguez said. "I don't think you can quite identify the player with the person off the field. What he does is part of the intimidation factor. Some people take it the wrong way, but he's a great athlete and a great player."

Defensive coordinator Bill Young is

proud of both Styles the on-field terror and Styles the hard-working, capable student.

"He's a real intense guy and a very intelligent young man, and that's what you want," Young said. "We ask our players to play with a defensive mentality and he's definitely got that. Fortunately, he's got the talent to go with it.

"We think he's the best linebacker in the country and we're real excited to see what he can do for us this season."

An improvement on last year would be downright scary. In 1993, Styles entered preseason camp as a backup outside linebacker and forced his way into the starting lineup. Then he replaced former All-American Steve Tovar in the middle and easily led OSU with 117 tackles, 84 of them solo stops and nine of them for loss. First-team All-Big Ten honors followed as well as a nomination to *Football News'* Sophomore All-American team.

Naturally, head coach John Cooper is among those expecting another strong season from Styles.

"A year ago today, people didn't know Lorenzo Styles," Cooper said of his 6-2, 244-pound wrecking ball. "He was a second-team outside linebacker and people weren't even asking about him. Now he's a fixture for us and a young man who can really play.

"He's got good work ethic, a good attitude, and the good Lord has blessed him with a lot of talent. I think he can have an even better year this year than last year. I think he can lead us again with even more tackles and improve on his pass coverage."

While his coach heaps on the praise, Styles was underwhelmed with his play a year ago.

"I really didn't surprise myself," he said. "I had a pretty decent year, but there's always room for improvement. I'm really not pleased with what I've done here yet."

Styles, who calls many of OSU's defensive signals in the huddle, added he wants to improve reading tendencies and formations, dissecting film and paying more attention to specialized techniques.

He may be a few particulars away from being mentioned in the same breath with former OSU greats Randy Gradishar, Tom Cousineau, Marcus Marek, Pepper Johnson, Chris Spielman and Tovar, names that helped summon him to the school in the first place.

"I always knew Ohio State was a good linebacker school and that was one of my reasons for coming here, but I don't ever try to place my game with anybody else's game," Styles said. "I might try something they've done and if it works for me I'll use it. But I think every man should have his own name."

Styles, still only a junior, may soon try to make that name in the NFL. It's no secret he has taken note of the early path taken by Wilkinson and others and the gobs of money in store. But Young does not want that option to become an issue, at least until after this season.

"As a football coach, if you've got a young guy like that, you hope he will be back," the OSU assistant coach said. "We'll just have to wait and see what takes place. Lorenzo is going to have to do what is best for him and his family.

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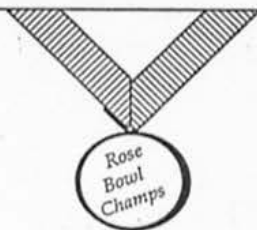


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Hopefully, he'll be back for his senior year. If he isn't, we'll wish him well and go from there."

Before Styles comes to that decision, he will spend the rest of '94 anchoring a potentially disruptive Buckeye defense with a majority of outside help coming from Craig Powell, also a junior. Many believe that the duo could be the nation's best at linebacker in '95, provided they both stay in school. Styles believes he and Powell are already one of the best tandems in country.

"I feel like we have a real good combination and chemistry, and playing with Craig is exciting," he said. "Hopefully, Greg Bellisari will jell in with us and make us even better."

As for Illinois linebackers Dana Howard, Simeon Rice and John Holocek getting most of the preseason hype as the top backer corps in the Big Ten, Styles said, "If Illinois was rated the best, then congratulations to them. But it's all about Saturday."

While there's no mistaking that Styles consistently comes through on game day, he also has a reputation for being unrelenting on the practice field during the week.

He has spent much of his time this

fall camp feasting on OSU's quartet of rookie running backs.

"I'll try not to back down to him," freshman Joe Montgomery said the day before practice began, "but being hit by him is something to think about. I've met Lorenzo. That guy's nuts."

Rodriguez is doing his best to protect the young runners.

"This is the initiation time for the freshmen, so to speak, and Lorenzo is more than willing to accommodate them," he said. "I'm sure they'll learn right away that you've got to learn to hold your own out there."

"As for me, I consider myself a hard-nosed type of guy, too, and I'm not about to let a guy run over me to get to the ball carrier. We're going to have some interesting confrontations all year, I'm sure."

Styles sees nothing unusual about his all-out tendencies on the field.

"It's just my personality," he said with no apologies. "I'm a strong competitor and I don't like to lose."

"Some games you do put more into than others, but each game you've got to pretty much have the same will to play. To do that, I try to practice hard every day."

When on the field, everything is simple and clear of purpose for Styles. That's why he does not allow himself to get caught up in petty things like jersey numbers. Styles wore number nine as a two-way player for Farrell (Pa.) High School. When an equipment manager asked him if he would wear 90 as a Buckeye, he agreed with no special thought.

"I'm not big on numbers or anything like that," he said. "Let's just play."



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