

Scouting Report: 2021 Three-Star TE Sam Hart



It took just two days for Ohio State to move on from a 29-23 loss to Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl on Dec. 28, as the Buckeyes secured a commitment on Dec. 30 from 2021 three-star tight end Sam Hart. OK, maybe that commitment isn't enough to erase the memory of that loss, but it should certainly lessen the blow, because in Hart, the Buckeyes have landed what looks to be a rising star in the 2021 class, at a position of great need.

Hart, a Cherokee Trail (Co.) High School product, committed to Ohio State as the nation's 365th best player and 15th best tight end per the 247Sports composite, but it's extremely unlikely that he'll head to Columbus with those same rankings. He's been on a pretty consistent ratings rise since he was first scouted in April, and his offer list in recent months reflects a rise to the upper echelon of tight end recruits in his class. The best way to tell if a recruit is primed for a jump is through his recent offers.

In the last six months, Hart's is about as strong as they come for a tight end: LSU, Ohio State, Penn State and Virginia Tech in May, Texas and Notre Dame in June, Georgia Tech, Minnesota and Tennessee during the season. If he was under the radar at one point, coming out of a non-traditional high school football state like Colorado, he's been found by just about every team in the country.

Obviously, Ohio State got to him quicker than just about anyone else. The offer in May was followed by months of heavy recruitment from tight ends coach Kevin Wilson, a November visit to Columbus, and now, a commitment that should end Hart's recruitment before it truly kicks off, with a high possibility of an even larger ratings jump after the summer recruiting camp gauntlet.

In Hart, Ohio State is getting a pretty familiar style of player. Ryan Day has emphasized athletic ability and receiver play in tight end recruits since his arrival at Ohio State, taking Jeremy Ruckert in 2018 and Joe Royer in 2020, who could both be considered receivers more than tight ends out of high school. Cormontae Hamilton in 2019 was a bit of a strange departure, but in general, Day seems to want tight ends who can excel in the passing game from day one, while adding the blocking part of the equation under Wilson during their formative seasons.

Hart has essentially the same physical build as Ruckert and Royer coming out of high school. He's 6-foot-5, 225 pounds. Ruckert was 6-foot-5 1/2, 238 pounds, while Royer is 6-foot-5, 225 pounds. Ruckert has bulked up at Ohio State, checking in at 250 pounds, an experience that Royer and Hart will also go through during their first few years in Columbus.

The other unifying factor is, of course, skillset. Ruckert and Royer were both essentially big receivers in

high school, and while Hart plays more on the line than they did, he spends a lot of his time in the slot for his high school team. This has made him a very strong route runner, with the ability to high point passes, while serving as a matchup nightmare for every defense he faces. Obviously, college defenses are better equipped to hand a player like Hart, but the kind of talent he has is still very rare.

As a pass catcher, Hart would be ready as a freshman. He has no trouble in the receiving game, and the majority of his improvements there will be technical and minor. Just like his predecessors, Hart's obstacle at Ohio State will be run blocking. He's not bad at it, he just really hasn't been asked to do it much. He's more valuable as a receiver for his high school team, so using him as a blocker would be a waste. At Ohio State, he'll need to block, and to do that, he'll have some learning to do.

The Buckeyes have yet to see Ruckert truly emerge, though he's been trapped behind veteran players in each of his first two seasons. With Hart, Ohio State is betting that the Ruckert approach will pay off, and that Royer and Hart can follow in the path that he blazed. If it works, Ohio State could become a tight end factory in a way that the Buckeyes have really never been. If not, Day's tight end recruiting approach could be in for a reset.