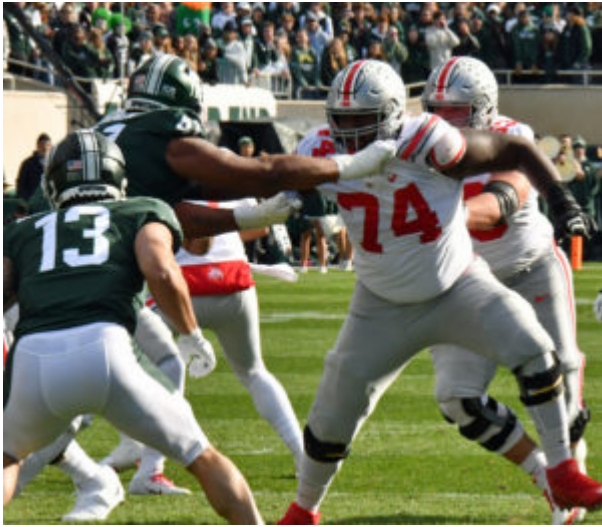


Taking Stock Of The Offensive Line



With two NFL draft declarations made from Ohio State's starting offensive line this season — and another viewed as a near-certainty — plus the announced return of rising sixth-year offensive guard Matthew Jones, the outlook for the Buckeyes' front five in 2023 is beginning to take shape.

As left tackle Paris Johnson and center Luke Wypler leave for the league, with right tackle Dawand Jones expected to join them, now seems like a good time to take a look at the possibilities for the 2023 Ohio State offensive line.

Even without factoring a transfer — the Buckeyes have already swung and missed on two tackles in the portal, former Rhode Island Ram Ajani Cornelius and former Washington State Cougar Jarrett Kingston — there's a lot of shuffling that could potentially happen. The only thing that's safe to project is that Jones and rising third-year Donovan Jackson will start again.

It's not even certain for either as to where.

Limited options at the position seem to push for Matthew Jones to be the team's starting center for 2023. He has experience as a backup there and it's the position he was recruited at out of high school. OSU has a history of transitioning starting guards to center successfully, with Billy Price and Pat Elflein being prime examples.

The other factor in sliding him over is that it seems to be the most optimal route to get the best five on the field, as has been head coach Ryan Day's philosophy through the years. Rising fifth-year Enokk Vimahi saw action as a sixth offensive lineman in specialty packages and did some spot work for Jones when he was injured this past season, and the former four-star prospect seems in line for his turn as an every-week starter. He projects best at right guard.

Still, Jones enjoyed the first starting successes of his career at the guard position and there's a chance it's his most natural. As stated above, though, there's not a lot of other choices in the middle.

Rising fourth-year Jakob James backed up Wypler this past season and is a veteran of the program. As a former three-star prospect, however, there's questions as to his ceiling. Incoming four-star recruit

Joshua Padilla is starting his career in Columbus at center but freshmen are almost never ready to start day one on the offensive line.

Rising fourth-year Josh Fryar seems a shoe-in to play right tackle. Coaches raved about his development the past two offseasons and he found a sub-package role as a blocking tight end in some high-leverage moments this past season. When Dawand Jones went down with an injury, Fryar filled in admirably against Indiana. There's a lot of punch to his run blocking and his pass protection has grown over time.

The question is really who starts opposite him at left tackle. Rising third-year Zen Michalski served as Johnson's backup in 2022 and has the pedigree of a four-star recruit, though a late riser. He played in a run-heavy offense in high school and will need to show he's up to snuff pass blocking if he wants a shot to protect Kyle McCord or Devin Brown's blindside.

Barring an addition from the portal, if Michalski doesn't win the job Jackson has the athleticism to slide outside to tackle. Guard is the one position that Ohio State does have some depth at, with rising third-year Ben Christman and second-years Tegra Tshabola and Carson Hinzman all options to fill in.

Taking a stab at the starting lineup is hard with so much to shake out at this point. Michalski's upside has been there and the fact he solidified himself as a backup last year is a good sign. At this point, BSB's best projection is as follows: Michalski at left tackle, Jackson at left guard, Matthew Jones at center, Vimahi at right guard, Fryar at right tackle.

A dark horse candidate to shake things up: Tshabola. He could quietly factor in at tackle and showed enough last offseason to unseat a third-year veteran as a second-team guard. At 6-6, 330 pounds and finishing high school as the No. 104 prospect in the country, his pedigree, versatility and physical attributes could pave a way to a spot.