

Tim Walton Returning To Ohio State 'At The Right Time'



Before his decorated coaching career with four NFL teams and several Division I football programs, Tim Walton wore a scarlet and gray uniform on Saturday afternoons.

Walton played cornerback at Ohio State from 1990-93, where he started in 22 of 39 games and collected 156 tackles and 10 interceptions for the Buckeyes. Walton's first year of coaching was in 1995 as a graduate assistant for Bowling Green, working up the ladder to become a defensive backs coach in his fourth year.

He worked in the same role with Memphis, Syracuse, LSU and Miami before becoming a defensive coordinator for the Hurricanes in 2007. Walton returned to Memphis as its defensive coordinator the following year. However, he left that position for the NFL, where he coached defensive backs for the Detroit Lions, St. Louis Rams, New York Giants and — most recently — the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Walton said he wouldn't have guessed Ohio State would call him to ask about a coaching position. He hadn't worked in college football for 14 years. Still, Walton said he immediately felt a tug to return to his alma mater when Day asked if he would be interested in coaching the Buckeyes' secondary and cornerbacks.

"It hit at the right time to get a chance to come back here," Walton said. "Being in the NFL or college football, you don't know what path you'll end up taking. So those things work out at the right time. Sometimes you can want to come but the timing is not right or is not an opportunity that the job is open at that point. So it kind of just worked out this way. So it ended up being a great opportunity to get back home."

Walton emerged as a top candidate after Ohio State decided to part ways with former defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs and Matt Barnes left to become the defensive coordinator at Memphis. The Buckeyes wanted him, and he felt like he couldn't pass up the opportunity.

"It's a winning program. You don't get any better than this," Walton said on Jan. 31. "They play elite-level football. You're going to have a chance to play for it all every year. The fact that you played here so you're familiar with the territory. All those things just lined up. And like I said, you don't get any better than this."

Walton said there isn't another place like Ohio State in college football. He claims he wouldn't have left

the NFL for any other opening.

“That’s what made it easy to do, exciting to do,” Walton said. “You know you have a chance to play against the best of the best and at the end of the year, you have a chance to play for all the marbles if you do the right thing. So when you have that opportunity, I mean, that’s what it’s all about. It’s all about competing and it’s all about playing at the highest level. So when you get a chance to do that, you play in college football to have a chance at national championships. In the NFL, you want to get Super Bowls. That’s what competitors do and the fact that you get to do it at a place that you have strong ties with makes it a bonus.”

Walton thinks his experience as an Ohio State player will be a significant advantage to the student-athletes in the secondary. He also believes his NFL coaching experience will help him develop the next Buckeye cornerbacks who will go on to play in the professional league.

“It does help to actually play here on his turf and practice here in this building and try to give some of that experience to them,” Walton said. “That’s a good benefit to be able to have to use as a selling point to kids that want to play here that I actually played the game. And then coaching in the NFL helps that transition to them because they all want to have that opportunity. So it’s kind of a good mix.”

Ohio State’s cornerback Jyaire Brown made it clear during his introduction to the media on Feb. 2 that he was impressed with Jalen Ramsey’s description of Walton. The Rams All-Pro cornerback called him “one of the best DB coaches, if not the best DB coach I’ve ever had.”

“I try not to prejudge and I’m just gonna go off how he coaches me and how he coaches his players, but that’s definitely a thing to keep in my mind knowing that he coached NFL corners, and that’s where I’m trying to get at the end of the day,” Brown said.

While the college football landscape continues to change because of name, image and likeness rules and the transfer portal — factors that weren’t present 30 years ago — Walton isn’t worried about that affecting his coaching style or mentality. He believes in strong relationships with his players so he can hold them accountable to be the best version of themselves.

“If you have the relationship, then that means you can go teach them. If they allow you to teach them, they’ll get better. And if they feel that you can help them, they’ll be willing to listen. But that all starts with the relationship,” Walton said. “Because at times, you gotta coach guys hard. And if you have the relationship with them, and then you coach them hard and they feel you can make them better - that doesn’t change whether it’s in college or the NFL - if they feel you can make them better and the relationship is right, they are willing to listen. And if they’re willing to listen, they’re willing to grow and get better. And that’s the dream of a coach and that’s how you want it to play out for you.”

Walton doesn’t expect to coach Ohio State’s cornerbacks and safeties differently than he coached players in the NFL. He expects recruits that come to Columbus to have next-level talent, so he will work with them to maximize their skills so they can realize their dreams of playing for a professional franchise.

“We want to find the best coaches possible. A lot of the coaches that have coached in the NFL have coached some of the best players in the country,” Day said on Jan. 31. “And so when someone comes in as a recruit, they want to be recruited, they want to be coached by the best and be developed the best.

"If you're trying to go find the best guy at what he does in his job, a lot of those guys have coached in the NFL, when you look at their résumés, and Tim's one of them."

Ohio State is the latest stop in Walton's long-tenured coaching career. However, this might be the most excited he's been for a season in a long time because of what the program has meant to him and those he played with long ago.

"It's a lifetime journey when you're here. You're family for life here," Walton said. "A lot of former players still live here in the area. So it's been exciting to get a chance to come back. And it's a dream come true to come back to a place that you basically grew up as a young child, a young man at.

"Just walking the halls and stuff and just being back in here ... It's special, man. So I'm embracing it all and looking forward to it and just gonna try to make sure I go out and do my best and work hard and try to give the kids and the young players a chance to develop and help them achieve the dreams that they want to do."