

In The Film Room: Sam Mustipher

Written by Sean Mele

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The Fighting Irish are on the prowl for quality offensive linemen to build off of their latest class and Olney, Md. product [Sam Mustipher](#) fits that profile nicely. The 2014 prospect has been steadily piling up the offers and as recent as two weeks ago added Alabama and Oklahoma to his already impressive résumé. Besides the Irish, Crimson Tide, and Sooners, Mustipher holds 22 other potential scholarships from schools like Florida, Michigan, Clemson, and Ohio State. He was in South Bend in January where he was personally offered by head coach Brian Kelly. He has yet to name any favorites, but is high on Notre Dame and is expected to return again this spring. After initially wanting to take his time with the process, Mustipher has talked about making a decision prior to his senior season.

FRAME/GROWTH POTENTIAL

Mustipher isn't as tall as some of the linemen Notre Dame has pursued in recent years, but he's still 6-foot-3 and some would say closer to 6-foot-4. The average height of the offensive linemen the Irish signed in 2013 is 6-foot-6, so he does fall a few inches short. That being said, I believe he'll end up as a guard or center on the next level anyway where height isn't a major requirement to be successful. Even if he was 6-foot-1, he's a really good player who would still be able to help whichever team he signs with next year.

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The Good Counsel High School standout weighs close to 290 pounds and looks like a wrecking ball in pads. He fills out every inch of his uniform and passes the proverbial "eye test" without an issues. He carries his weight well and with has heavy as he already is I would venture to say he'd probably top out around 310 pounds by the time he's done growing. If he was 6-foot-6 I wouldn't hesitate to say he'd be comfortable around 320 pounds, but the "shorter" linemen need to make sure they don't gain weight for the sake of gaining weight and lose some of their quickness off the ball.

ATHLETIC ABILITY

Mustipher has quick feet which enables him to make all the blocks. Whether he's reaching an outside shade, cutting off the inside gap, or pass blocking he moves well and gets into position without any limitations. I talked about how well he carries his weight and this is a great indicator of that evaluation. Let's be honest, it doesn't take much to base block a guy who's head up to you, but the real measuring stick for an offensive lineman is how well he makes the blocks that require him to come out of his comfort zone and move his feet somewhere besides straight ahead.

His strength is clearly evident in his blocking. When he gets a hold of a defensive player and combines that with his lower body strength the party is over for whomever he's locked up with. He has the power in his legs to move people off the ball quite easily and he uses that to his advantage whenever he can. There were also a few instances when he was pass blocking where he stoned the defender with his punch and there was nothing else left to do but make sure he stayed in front of the man. This kid has the strength and physical attitude to be successful when he gets to college.

SKILLS/TECHNIQUE

The first thing I look for when I watch an offensive lineman is what happens to his feet right after he makes initial contact. Do they stop or do they keep moving? The difference between an aggressive and well-coached offensive lineman and all the rest is if those feet keep moving. Mustipher passes this test with flying colors as his feet don't stop on contact and he drives his legs with a wide base until the block is finished. His base blocking is his strength and the way he works his feet throughout the entire block is a big reason why.

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If I've said it once, I've said it one hundred times – when an offensive lineman stops his feet on contact he loses all the momentum and power he gained from firing off the ball, which gives the defender a chance to recover from the initial blast. When the defender is stunned from the initial blast there's a split second opportunity to move him off the ball and if the offensive lineman doesn't take advantage of the opportunity by keeping his feet moving then the block becomes that much more difficult to execute.

I like Mustipher's pad level at the snap, but I'd like to see him stay lower for a little bit longer during the block. He rises up just a little too quickly and against better competition he may find himself in dogfight more often than he'd like. This is something that can be easily fixed down the road and he has the ability to get it done.

During the plays when he's on the backside he has a great cutoff block when protecting the B gap from penetration. His step is quick and he puts himself in great position to make the block. The only thing he needs to work on is making sure he gets his head all the way across the defenders body so he doesn't slide off and make the tackle.

He has a nice, quick pass set and uses his hands really well to get inside position on the defender. Once he makes his initial punch his feet are constantly moving as he continues to mirror his man and protect the passer. His footwork may be a little off in terms of technique for a tackle, but as a guard or center on the next level he'll be fine.

Mustipher is a grinder and works hard to make sure he gets his job done on the field. He works hard and is physical at the point of attack or when chasing down a linebacker. He stays with his assignment too, even if things aren't going as planned he'll fight to make sure he gets his man any way he can. He has a workmanlike attitude on the field and will give you everything he has on every play.

OVERALL

Mustipher is a terrific offensive lineman who would be a perfect fit at guard or center for Notre Dame. He has the footwork to run zone schemes as well as the power to execute gap runs. He's strong, has great technique, and likes the physical challenge being an offensive lineman presents to him. His base blocking is as solid as it gets and once he cleans up a few minor

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technique flaws he could be one of the better offensive linemen to come out of the class of 2014.

GRADES

Size: 85 (perfect center or guard size)

Strength: 90 (muscles defenders, great lower body)

Speed: 75 (moves to the next level well, gets downfield too)

Athletic Skills: 85 (great feet, agile, quick, can make every block)

Technique: 88 (tremendous base blocker, needs a few minor fixes)

Versatility: 85 (will play center or guard, can run or pass block, can pull and get out on screens)

Upside: 4.0 (could be a dominate run blocker – why else do you think Alabama offered him?)

Overall Grade: 4.0

GRADE KEY

90-100 – Elite/Exceptional: Skill set is rare and gives prospect ability to dominate

80-89 – Very Good/Outstanding: Skill set is a significant strength

70-79 – Average: Skill set is solid, not a significant weakness

60-69 – Below Average: Skill set is not a strength for this player and could become a liability

50-59 – Very Poor: Prospect does not possess this trait and it is a definite liability

OVERALL/UPSIDE GRADE KEY

5 – Elite: Player is one of the best players at his position nationally, potentially dominant

4 – Very Good/Outstanding: Player is a potential standout and starter, could also play early

3 – Solid: Player is a potential contributor, could eventually start down the road

2 – Below Average: Player does not possess the talent to be a significant contributor

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1 – Poor: Let's be honest, Notre Dame is not going to bring in anyone with a one!