

Day, Hartline Confident Jaxon Smith-Njigba Will Play Again This Season



Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline said Tuesday they are confident that wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba will take the field again for the Buckeyes this season.

Smith-Njigba has appeared in just three games this season while dealing with a lingering hamstring injury. He started Ohio State's season-opener against Notre Dame before leaving the game, and he made brief appearances against Toledo and Iowa, but did not look full healthy and did not finish either contest.

With the season beginning to wind down - Ohio State has, at most, seven games remaining after starting with an 8-0 record - there's understandable concern about whether or not Smith-Njigba can return and stay healthy, and Day said he felt optimistic that Smith-Njigba will be back, though he added the Buckeyes can achieve their goals this season even if he doesn't come back.

"But at the same time, we'd love to have him back, as I'm sure you can imagine," Day said. "But this team is working hard. And that's why we build depth because you just don't know. I'm sure that there's more adversity coming our way, so we're going to rely on our leadership.

"We're into November now, so you just never know what's coming," he continued. "I think we build up some hardness to us and we've got to keep building on that as well."

Hartline said it's been challenging for Smith-Njigba to miss the time he has this season. Entering the year, he was viewed as the top receiver in college football and was expected to continue rewriting Ohio State's record book. Instead, he has just five catches for 43 yards.

"He's beating himself up a little bit," Hartline said. "He's been better this week, I'll say that. I think I could echo what he's saying if he was here standing in front. He wants to play in the worst way and he's frustrated."

Relegated to the bench instead of a starting role due to his injury, Smith-Njigba has continued to be a positive influence within Ohio State's locker room, according to Hartline.

"That being said, he's done a great job of not being a distraction and picking the guys up and staying locked in and FaceTimed them before the game on Saturday," Hartline said. "Like all those things have been awesome. But I know as a competitor, he's frustrated and he wants to get back. But I think overall, he's OK."