

Day, Wilson Claim Stover's Tight End Move Was His Decision



Cade Stover possesses tremendous versatility. His lean and muscular frame helped him become one of Ohio's best high school prospects, catching Ohio State's attention — namely offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson and defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

The Mansfield (Ohio) Lexington High School four-star recruit signed with the Buckeyes after an All-American senior season at linebacker. He also added almost 1,500 yards and 17 touchdowns at running back that year.

When Stover arrived in Columbus, he immediately worked with linebackers coach Al Washington and strength and conditioning director Mickey Marotti to become a more well-rounded college athlete. He played in three games as a true freshman — both at linebacker and defensive end — including a two-tackle performance against Cincinnati. Stover collected snaps in eight games the following season, finishing with three tackles and a forced fumble.

In 2021, Ohio State needed tight end depth after the Jacksonville Jaguars selected Luke Farrell with a fifth-round pick. The Buckeyes returned veteran Jeremy Ruckert, who had starting experience next to Farrell. Still, the offense needed a headstrong backup that could block and establish the line of scrimmage in the running game.

Stover filled that role admirably for Ohio State, though his statistical production left much desired. In February, Stover said he missed playing linebacker after filling that spot in the Rose Bowl and thought he could return to that position this fall. He started there in spring practices, but his stop stint remained brief. Ohio State head coach Ryan Day revealed that Stover would be back at tight end this spring.

"At the end of the day, it was really up to him," Day said Tuesday. "And I think he saw — moving forward — he's got a huge ceiling at tight end. When you look at the work that he's put in the past year and his skill set, he's got a chance to be a good tight end. I think he would tell you that he wants to bring that same defensive mentality to the offense, and he can do that. He's strong. He's powerful. He's athletic, got really good ball skills, and was a good high school basketball player. He's back over at the tight end position and had a good couple of practices."

Day and Wilson won't call Stover's latest position change permanent and think he could make another

move back to defense. Whatever happens, the Buckeye coaches want Stover to become comfortable in his role, claiming that having one position will help his development.

“Now that he’s a veteran in the program, he has a voice and we want to put them in the best position to be successful,” Day said. “There’s always been conversation about it, and now that he’s been there for a couple of practices, we’ll continue to talk about it. But he needs to focus on something for a while in order to be successful. We can’t keep bouncing around.”

Day referred to a “logjam” created at linebacker because of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles’ scheme that includes four linemen, two linebackers and five defensive backs. Ohio State has several players that will fight for playing time at the second level, making Stover’s return to tight end more understandable.

Stover will still face competition for playing time at tight end, as Joe Royer and Gee Scott Jr. are also in the mix. However, they are both undersized for an in-line blocker. On the other hand, Stover has the body type the Buckeyes desire for the position.

“I think he has the skills to be very, very good,” Wilson said. “I probably have more respect for him after he went to defense. The way he played defense and worked out in the winter. He became one of the premier leaders of this team with the way he approached our workouts and all that.”

Stover looks poised to step into a more hands-on role in the offense with the coaching staff’s support. Ohio State isn’t known for significant tight end usage in the passing game, but Stover’s frame and toughness will make a vital part of the Buckeyes’ rushing attack — an area of the offense that could use improvement this fall.