

Eichenberg Braving Battered Hands For OSU Defense



When starting off a story about a player battling through injury, it's customary to include specifics about what that injury is.

It's clear that something is wrong with both of Tommy Eichenberg's hands. Ohio State third-year safety Lathan Ransom called them "messed up," fourth-year defensive end Zach Harrison called them "broken." When asked directly whether they were broken Nov. 22, however, the soft-spoken Eichenberg gave a quick three-word answer.

"I'm not sure," he said. "They feel good though."

It seems as though the Buckeyes' top linebacker and leading tackler hasn't really stopped to consider exactly what the problem is. All he knows is it's not enough to keep him off the field during what has been a breakout season.

"It'd take a lot to stop me from playing, especially with this team, this defense," Eichenberg said.

In 11 games in 2022, the fourth-year team captain has recorded more tackles (105) than any Ohio State player has in an entire season since Raekwon McMillan piled up 119 takedowns in 2015.

His 12 tackles for loss are the most in a season by any Ohio State player since defensive end Chase Young and linebacker Malik Harrison collected 21 and 16 1/2, respectively, in 2019. Eichenberg's added 2 1/2 sacks to those totals.

"Tommy's as tough as they come," Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said. "He's as tough as any player I've been around. He kind of epitomizes what we want to be as a defense and, I think, as a program. Because nothing is going to stop him. No matter what the circumstance or the injury, it's going to show up."

That identity is something other players look toward. Ransom broke his right thumb on the Buckeyes' first defensive play against Maryland Nov. 19, but later used that same right hand to block a punt against the Terrapins.

"We're just doing what we've got to do to win the game, doing what I've got to do for my brother," Ransom said. "I mean, at the end of the day, like, Tommy is playing with two messed up hands. What's my excuse to not go out there and play?"

With the team's toughness called into question after last week's Michigan game, there's no doubt that Eichenberg is showing that exact trait entering this year's rendition.

"If Tommy's out there with two broken hands and Lathan is dealing with what he's dealing with, it's 'Oh, they're out there on the field playing, like what do I gotta say if I'm a little sore or my knees hurt,'" Harrison said. "I just got to go play, we all got to go play."