

Justin Hilliard To Apply For Sixth Season



Ohio State redshirt senior linebacker Justin Hilliard may not be in his final college football season after all, despite his status as a fifth-year senior. The Cincinnati native told reporters on Nov. 6 that he had filed a petition with the NCAA for a sixth year of eligibility, per a report from Colin Hass-Hill of Eleven Warriors.

The sixth year of eligibility is rare in college football, but can be given to players that missed at least one full season due to injury. Hilliard has missed quite a few games in his career with injury, but the season he would likely be seeking to make up for is 2016, when he missed almost the entire season with a bicep injury, his second in as many years at Ohio State.

If given the sixth year, Hilliard said that he would “probably” return and play for Ohio State next season, though he could certainly pursue other avenues in the transfer portal.

Hilliard has provided a spark this season for Ohio State, and had the best game of his career in the Buckeyes’ 38-7 win over Wisconsin, where he picked up just one tackle (for a loss) but spent the entire game stuffing the Badger rushing attack. He’s been an integral part of Ohio State’s rush defense and would compete for the vacancy left by Malik Harrison if he is to return in 2020.

“It means so much, having great moments,” said Hilliard after that Wisconsin game. “At times when I was down and [teammates] were picking me up, it means so much.”

Hilliard has been the frequent recipient of praise from his coaches as well, as a leader and a contributor on the field.

“Justin Hilliard, the story of him playing the way he played and being able to step up in a game like that and help us is a story that really isn’t being told for whatever reason,” Ryan Day said after that game. “But this is a guy, with today’s day and age with portals and everything else, he stuck through it. He worked through injuries, he worked through playing time issues, and then he steps up in a huge moment for us to beat Wisconsin and plays really well and makes some big-time tackles.

“That goes to show you what kind of a kid Justin Hilliard is. He’s got character, he’s got perseverance, everything about him is great. He’s helped us on special teams for years, but now he’s able to step up into that role and make those kind of plays for the team.”

Once a five-star recruit, Hilliard has recorded 43 total tackles in his five years with Ohio State, as he’s

battled with injuries for essentially his entire tenure.