

# Dre'Mont Jones Declares For NFL Draft, Clarifies Rose Bowl Plans



After he decided to delay his NFL dreams at the end of the 2017 season, holding off the draft and returning to Ohio State as a fourth-year junior for the 2018 campaign, Dre'Mont Jones' plans for future throughout the past year has been no secret.

While the writing was on the wall, Jones left no doubt Wednesday when he announced his declaration for the 2019 draft. But the real question remained — would Jones join the Buckeyes in Pasadena, Calif., for its Rose Bowl matchup with Washington?

The 6-3, 286-pounder left reporters with a cliffhanger Dec. 2 in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center team room when he simply said “we’ll see” about his Jan. 1 participation. Back in front of media Wednesday on the indoor practice field, though, Jones clarified his plans.

“I’m playing,” he said. “I kind of want to finish what I started, kind of built off what we started in the first, in the middle (of the season). ... With everything we’ve been through I kind of just don’t want to leave and just do my own thing just yet because I still have another game to play.”

The battle between No. 6 OSU (12-1) and the No. 9 Huskies (10-3) counts for Jones' 37th career game in a scarlet and gray jersey. Despite his force on Ohio State's defensive line with 40 tackles (13 for loss), 8 1/2 sacks and two touchdowns — one interception return and one fumble recovery — he fought to stay on the field.

Jones sprained an ankle Sept. 29 in the Buckeyes' 27-26 win at Penn State and never seemed to fully recover, playing through the pain into October and November. Even with his bumps and bruises along the way, he gave OSU's defensive line leadership and stops of heightened importance after junior defensive end Nick Bosa left.

“I’m feeling good,” Jones said. “It’s the end of the year. You have those nagging bumps and bruises that you usually have, but I’m going to be fine. ... If it did slow me down, I’ll say maybe momentarily. I sat out practice a little bit and then kind of do rehab, ice up and then pop an Advil and then I’ll be all right.”

While draft-eligible players increasingly sit out bowl games to keep healthy and start preparation, Jones went against the grain. Absent from Ohio State's 24-7 victory vs. Southern California in the 2017 Cotton Bowl, then-junior cornerback Denzel Ward practiced that week but decided not to play, the team

announced before kickoff.

"My thing with injuries is they are part of the game," Jones said. "So you have to kind of just play with it, kind of just go around it and not think about it. Because as much as you think about it, the more it can affect you so you kind of have to ignore it."

With injuries in mind, had Jones sat out, the Buckeyes would have understood. To junior defensive tackle Davon Hamilton, though, there was never much doubt about Jones along the defensive line.

"Dre'Mont, he's just a competitor," Hamilton said. "You can't really ask anything else out of him. He loves us just as much as we love him. This is going to be his last football game being a Buckeye, so I'm excited to see him play."

When the sun sets on Jones' career at 5 p.m. ET New Year's Day, so does head coach Urban Meyer's seven-year stint in Columbus. Meyer, who officially retires Jan. 2 as two-year offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Ryan Day takes over, constantly commended Jones' toughness when the team needed its top defensive tackle most.

"In spring practice, I had a hard time saying (Jones) wasn't as good as any player we had on the team, including (Bosa)," Meyer said Oct. 11. "(Jones) was right there with (Bosa) and I can see it continue. He's battling through a little bit of an injuries ... but I can't say enough good things about him."

After he redshirted his 2015 season, Jones' career statistics over the subsequent three seasons from 2016-18 feature an all-around skill set in the trenches. He has racked up 111 tackles (22 for loss), 9 1/2 sacks, four pass breakups, three fumble recoveries, and a forced fumble.

The overall body of work puts Jones in position to crack the first round, ranked by CBS Sports as the NFL draft's No. 20 overall prospect. Despite the risk, he enters his finale in "The Granddaddy of Them All" with no regrets as Jones and the Buckeyes look to go out on top.

"People always give the stigma of injuries, but I feel like you can get injured doing anything," Jones said. "You can get injured walking outside. I can get injured driving home in my car. I can get injured doing anything, so injuries are going to be there. Can't really just avoid that, so I'm going to play. I love the game of football, so I'm going to play."

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