

Ohio State OL Branden Bowen Back Healthy, Hungry



Ohio State fifth-year senior offensive lineman Branden Bowen earned the starting spot at right guard prior to the 2017 season and started six games before suffering a broken fibula against Maryland, ending his season prematurely.

The road to recovery was a brutal one for the Draper, Utah, native. Entering fall camp of 2018, Bowen thought he was healthy and ready to compete to earn back his spot. However, he had to endure another devastating setback.

“I kind of felt it during fall camp, brought it to the trainer’s attention and I went and got the X-rays and they showed that there was a gap still there, so they had to go in and put a plate and screws in,” Bowen said.

The surgery was Bowen’s third operation on his left leg in less than one year. While trying to compete with immense pain in his leg, Bowen admitted that he lacked his normal mobility and aggression, negatively affecting his performance. He lost the job to then-senior Demetrius Knox and elected to have that third surgery after the season began.

Bowen finally returned to practice near the end of the season after undergoing more rehab, but did not see the field, despite injuries to Knox and then-sophomore left tackle Thayer Munford.

Ohio State offensive line coach Greg Studrawa acknowledged the difficulty of what Bowen has been through.

“I think it was extremely hard,” Studrawa said. “I think what people don’t realize is when the kid gets injured like that, the mental aspect is way more than the physical. The physical, we have the best people in the world getting these kids back.

“But what you can’t ever judge is how he feels. When they’re hurt and when they come back, the biggest thing then is getting back into live action, and not being worried about hurting again.”

Studrawa was spot on in his assessment of Bowen, who admitted to worrying about re-injuring his leg last fall.

“It was really frustrating,” Bowen said of his painful path back to 100%. “It’s a lot more mental than it is physical. Physically, it’s a process. But mentally, it’s like a real battle, because you have your good days, you have your bad days — sometimes you feel like you’re never going to get out of it.

“You kind of went from the highest point in my life to the lowest point of my life, or what felt like the lowest point in my life. But it’s a process, I grew from it and it helped me a lot to be where I’m at now.”

The Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon product is entering his fifth season as a Buckeye and is currently competing with senior Joshua Alabi and redshirt freshmen Max Wray and Nicholas Petit-Frere at right tackle. Munford will start again at left tackle.

“I feel great,” Bowen said. “I feel like I’m in the best shape of my life. I’m the strongest I’ve ever been, the fastest I’ve ever been, and I feel great.”

While Alabi has starting experience and Petit-Frere was the No. 1 tackle in the 2018 class, a move back to guard could be in the works for Bowen.

“The other thing that Bowen has the ability to do is go play guard, like he started at guard two years ago before his injury,” Studrawa said. “So Bowen can go in there and play some guard, too. So that’s another bonus. So he may fit in the guard picture, he may fit in the tackle picture.”

Versatility is a staple of the Ohio State offensive line, who has had three consecutive converted guards earn All-America accolades at center. With a number of strong offensive tackles, perhaps a move back to guard, where his main competition would be redshirt sophomore Wyatt Davis and Rutgers graduate transfer Jonah Jackson, could help Bowen see the field.

“I think we’re as close now as we’ve been,” Studrawa said of Bowen’s recovery. “I really see some things. I think it still tends to get sore on him as we go, but I think right now I’ve seen him move, strike, drive his legs, like the old Bowen before that injury now.”

With his last start coming on Oct. 7, 2017, against Maryland, Bowen is hungrier than ever to get back on the field with his Scarlet and Gray teammates. His injury is in his rearview and the tribulations he has endured give him the strength to move forward.

“I kind of just look it as an opportunity,” Bowen said. “I’ve been through so much worse, and there’s not much more you can do to me to set me back. So I just know — no matter what — I’m going to fight through whatever comes up, and I’m going to be the best me.”

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