

Resetting The Summer: Stover Leads The Charge At Tight End



Every Saturday leading into the start of Ohio State's fall camp, Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be giving an outlook on each of the team's position groups. This week's position is tight end.

When Cade Stover announced he'd be returning to Ohio State for another season this past January, the top of the team's depth chart at the position was settled for the year.

Exiting one of the best seasons a Buckeye tight end has experienced in recent memory, Stover is one of the strongest leading voices in the team's locker room and certainly won't be supplanted as the starting line bookender.

Ohio State has shown a tendency to play a bevy of two-tight end sets on the offensive side, however, and the depth behind Stover contains plenty of intrigue. With that in mind, let's take a look at where the Buckeyes stand at the spot entering fall camp.

Projected starter: Cade Stover (r-Sr.)

Depth pieces: Joe Royer (r-Jr.), Gee Scott Jr. (Sr.), Jelani Thurman (Fr.), Bennett Christian (r-Fr.), Sam Hart (r-So.)

Young player to watch: Thurman

Breakdown: There were many who looked at Stover's position as the team's starting tight end at this time last year and viewed it as a weakness for Ohio State. An equal amount were calling for more frequent use of four-receiver sets for the team, limiting the chances a tight end was on the field altogether for a squad that hadn't made frequent passes to the spot in years past.

Stover worked to alleviate those anxieties by posting the most yards in a season by a Buckeye tight end (406) since Jeff Heurman in 2013 (466) and the most receptions (36) since Rickey Dudley in 1995 (37). His rugged mentality helped with the blocking side of his game as well.

The battle to back up Stover will be waged primarily between Royer and Scott, who were the former linebacker's top spell options in 2022. Both produced at low volume, with Scott picking up five catches for 28 yards and a touchdown with Royer at two receptions for 10 yards.

Royer missed seven games for a pulled groin, but dealt with much bigger heartache off the field as his mother, Micki, passed away in September.

"She'd always get on me about if I'm gonna do something, do it to the best of my ability. Don't ever sell myself short," Royer said in January. "So I'm just trying to live by that and continue to make her proud."

It will be interesting to see if one player claims the second spot on Ohio State's depth chart or if it earns an "or" designation.

Freshman Jelani Thurman has been making a push behind both of them. Entering Columbus with a high recruiting pedigree as the No. 3 tight end in the 247Sports composite rankings, Thurman lost his black stripe and made waves with his athleticism throughout spring. He joined the team physically ready to play at 6-6, 253 pounds. At the very least, he's an exciting prospect for the future, but there's a chance he pushes for playing time at some point this season.

Then there's Christian and Hart, who enter their second and third seasons at Ohio State, respectively. Christian was known for his potential as a blocking tight end out of high school and was a four-star prospect. Hart was a four-star prospect in his own right out of Aurora (Col.) Cherokee Trail.

Ohio State has a starter at tight end among the best in the Big Ten, if not the country, with enough competition behind him to provide quality depth in 2023.