

# Second-Year Wideouts Hoping To Earn Roles



Ohio State's starting trio at wide receiver is pretty much set for the 2023 season, because all three starters are back from 2022.

Juniors Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka return as just the second 1,000-yard tandem in team history, joined by senior Julian Fleming, who caught 34 passes for 533 yards and six touchdowns.

Two veterans are likely to fill out the depth behind them, with graduate Xavier Johnson and junior Jayden Ballard each supplementing the two-deep. But with Egbuka and Fleming both out for spring practice following offseason injuries, OSU's quartet of second-year pass catchers from the class of 2022 are hoping to make a name for themselves this spring.

"I'm enjoying having these young guys get opportunities, and they're doing a hell of a job," offensive coordinator and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline said. "The second-year guys are taking strides."

Caleb Burton is out for the time being as well, but Kyion Grayes, Kojo Antwi and Kaleb Brown are all hoping to make impacts in their own ways during March and April.

Antwi was a four-star prospect out of Suwanee (Ga.) Lambert coming out of high school, ranked the No. 151 prospect in the country. His differentiator among the 2022 wideouts is an ability to win contested catches, shielding off defenders with his compact 5-11, 194-pound frame. He views this spring as an opportunity to set himself up for next season after some or all of the above-mentioned starters leave.

"We're just trying to learn from the older guys and see how they operate," Antwi said. "When they leave, we'll take over the helm. So spring, it's critical for our development so we can get ready for fall."

Special teams can be a way for the group to find roles as well. Brown was seen working at punt returner at Ohio State's practice Thursday, and Grayes' speed and agility make him a clear candidate to be a gunner on punt or cover man on kickoff.

"I'm trying to help in any way possible," Grayes said. "I want to make sure that they see me out there."

Brown, a former four-star out of Chicago St. Rita, is the pure slot receiver of the bunch. With Johnson and Egbuka potentially in their final years as Ohio State's options at the position, a great year of development could set up Brown well for a 2024 starting spot. He played running back in high school, which he feels differentiates him as an athlete in space.

"My ability to run after the catch, that'd be the No. 1 thing," Brown said. "Just making plays, making plays as a big-time player when it counts."

Grayes hails from Chandler, Arizona, and vaulted from being a three-star whilst Ohio State was recruiting him to a top-100 prospect by the time all was said and done. He's been growing confidence over the past year.

"I thought I was prepared mentally (for college football), but looking at it now, I've changed a lot and I feel a lot better going out there on the field," Grayes said. "I feel more comfortable being in that offense."

All the second-years will be getting a push from OSU's incoming freshman class. High-end four-stars Carnell Tate and Noah Rogers are already on campus, with five-star Brandon Inniss to arrive in the fall.

"Already seen (the push happening), but it's no different than when Emeka and Marvin and these guys came in behind Jaxon (Smith-Njigba) and Julian, that whole class," Hartline said. "It's no different. [...] We've had that consistency, I love seeing it so early on."

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