

Stover Believes There's Still More For Him At OSU



One certainly has to wonder how much senior tight end Cade Stover's draft stock can rise above his current standing.

Last season the linebacker turned tight end turned linebacker turned tight end again hauled in the most receptions (36) by an OSU end-man since Rickey Dudley caught 37 balls in 1995. His 406 yards receiving were the most by a Buckeye tight end since Jeff Heurman's 466 in 2014.

As he weighed his options in the offseason with two years of eligibility remaining in Columbus, COVID-19 waiver included, something about the previous season just wouldn't depart from his mind.

"I felt like there was more," Stover said Wednesday. "There's more for me."

Wanting to make the most of his Ohio State opportunity and avenge some of the emotions he felt at the end of the 2022 campaign, Stover pushed his NFL Draft entry off one more year and came back for his senior season with the Buckeyes.

"As good of a year as the team had, there's more left," Stover said. "I felt uneasy. I don't know if I'd ever forgive myself, leaving a place like this that I've put so much into on a note like that. And I thought with (Keenan Bailey) getting the (tight end coaching) job now, I'm going to have a different side of the development than I did before."

The Michigan game was brutal enough for Stover, who had a touchdown reception ripped from his hands and a fourth-down pass bounce off his fingertips in the contest as OSU lost 45-23. In the College Football Playoff Semifinal against Georgia, though, Stover didn't even get a chance to be on the field in those key moments.

Landing hard on his back after making a catch in the first quarter, Stover left the game and went to a nearby hospital for an MRI. He was unable to follow the rest of the contest. Upon his exit from said MRI machine, he saw Georgia-colored confetti falling on TV.

"It hurt for everybody else," Stover said. "Nobody realizes how much we really go through together. When you're on the wall, somebody puking during mat drills, as nasty as that is and as weird as that is, that bonds you for a while. To see (the loss) happen, that hurt, but (this program) is full of such good people that it's hard to see that happen to good people."

That served as a primary motivation for why Stover returned. Bailey is excited to get to work now that he's returning.

"When he came back, I told him, 'You don't grow when you're comfortable,'" Bailey said. "For me to put him on the line and just go block defensive ends, he's not growing. So how many times can I make him uncomfortable this spring? Put him at positions he hasn't played, give him drills he's never done before, techniques he hasn't used before."

In terms of where he can grow, Stover feels there's a lot of experience for him to gain from having a year of legitimate tight end experience under his belt, with no uncertainty about his long-term position like there's been in his previous offseasons with the program. Having a year at the spot on tape allows him to evaluate the minutiae of his game in spring practice.

"I want to stay as healthy as possible, and I want to be as fast and as physical as I possibly can and clean up nuances that you really can't focus on because that was my first year playing tight end, really," Stover said. "

As for the injury, Stover is already back to being a full participant in spring practice. He stated missing time was "never an option." Memories of the ailment won't cause any hesitancy either, he added, if anything he feels he'll play with twice as much reckless abandon.

"You never know what's going to be your last day, what's going to be your last play," Stover said. "Someday it's going to come. So when you realize you can't play the rest of the game, could you have gone harder the first eight plays you were in there? If it's your last time doing something, you're going to enjoy the hell out of it, right? You just don't know when that's coming. So you've got to double down, whatever you've got to do to be in better shape, better physical shape, mental shape, whatever it is, you're going to do it."

Stover and the rest of the Buckeyes will be looking to right the wrongs of last season starting in September.