

Tommy Eichenberg, Xavier Johnson, Cade Stover Named Captains For 2023 Season



Ohio State announced the team's three captains for the season following Saturday's scrimmage, with the team voting for senior linebacker Tommy Eichenberg, fifth-year tight end Cade Stover and fifth-year wide receiver Xavier Johnson to lead the Buckeyes.

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Eichenberg and Stover are both returning captains, with wide receiver Kamryn Babb, quarterback C.J. Stroud and defensive end Tyler Friday having departed following last season, and linebacker Kourt Williams II - who was voted as a captain last season - was not voted as a captain this time around. Johnson - who was also named as the team's Block "O" recipient - is the only new captain for Ohio State.

A repeat performance is no surprise for Eichenberg or Stover, who have only built their case for being leaders on the team since being named captains last season. Eichenberg led the Buckeyes on the defensive end, finishing with a team-high 120 tackles - the most since Joshua Perry's 124 tackles in 2014 - despite playing with two broken hands.

"I called him 'Tommy Two Thumbs' because he barely had two thumbs," linebacker Cody Simon said. "He's so tough, and he inspires everyone else in the room. He's playing with broken hands? I can get through it, bruises and cuts, so anything he does, we'll follow."

Stover filled a similar role for the offense, dominating to the tune of 36 receptions for 406 yards and five touchdowns. While he could have departed for the NFL, he elected to come back for a fifth season, with

a lot of his decision coming down to how the season ended, with Ohio State suffering a loss to Georgia in the Peach Bowl in which Stover was injured in the first quarter with a fracture in his back.

"A lot of it had to do with, I just felt like there was more," he said. "As good as the year was, what the team had and everything, there's more left. I just 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."

Johnson's nomination for captaincy is also no surprise given what he has meant to the program since arriving in 2018, working his way from walk-on to significant contributor on offense. Entering this season, Johnson tasked himself with becoming a more vocal leader for the team.

"We always talk about, in the locker room, if stuff's not going right, who's going to bring the guys together and rally them? I think we had great people in the past," Johnson said in the spring. "I've been here for a while, so Jordan Fuller, Jonathon Cooper, Justin (Fields) was a good leader, C.J. Saunders was an excellent leader, Kam Babb, C.J. Stroud - I've been a part of all these guys and I've been able to see what they do and try to implement that into the way that I desire to lead.

"I think that that's the biggest thing is first kind of just taking that next step, because I've been a leader kind of behind the scenes," he continued. "But I think that now it's time to lead in a different manner as an older guy."

The Buckeyes' three captains are the fewest for the program since 2009, when defensive back Kurt Coleman, linebacker Austin Spitler and defensive tackle Doug Worthington were named captains, and Ohio State had at least six captains in every season from 2014-22. Furthermore, just two defensive captains are the fewest since only linebacker Joshua Perry and safety Tyvis Powell were named captains on the defensive side of the ball in 2015.