

Wide Receivers Xavier Johnson, Carnell Tate Likely To Have Bigger Roles In Cotton Bowl



Ohio State wide receivers Xavier Johnson and Carnell Tate couldn't be in more different of a spot in their college football careers, but both of them are looking at increased playing time in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29.

With Marvin Harrison Jr. very likely sitting out of the game and Julian Fleming in the transfer portal, two starting spots have opened up in the Buckeyes last game of the season with Johnson and Tate the two most likely to fill those spots.

For Johnson, it's the last game of his six-year career at Ohio State, which he said is tough for him to realize, but its helping him channel that feeling into putting everything he has into one final game.

"With my career coming to a close at Ohio State, there's a lot of emotions," Johnson said. "When you tie your heart to something and it comes to a close, that's definitely emotional. The best way I can show my appreciation, show the love I have for this university, for my brothers and for this team is to prepare the best I can and put my best foot forward when I go out there on Friday."

Tate is a true freshman who was able to get some time on the field in the middle of the year when Emeka Egbuka was recovering from an injury. He finished the regular season with 17 catches for 260 yards and one touchdown, which came in the 63-10 blowout of Western Kentucky early in the season.

In just one season at Ohio State, his teammates have already been able to recognize his work ethic, and how talented he is going to be.

"He's been here since he got here," cornerback Denzel Burke said about Tate. "He's going to be the next first rounder out of here, mark my words. He's a great player. He's a pro on and off the field. I kind of see a little bit of me when I was a freshman coming in and just how focused he was and how much this game means to him."

With opt outs becoming more common, bowl games can be a time where young talent can explode onto the scene, and Egbuka thinks that is going to happen for the younger Buckeyes pass catchers in this game, just like it did for him a couple years ago.

"This is where young guys step up," Egbuka said. "It happened to Marv and I in the Rose Bowl. It's

something that happens every year where your depth might be shortened a little bit. It's a game where you're able to get your feet wet a little more. For Carnell, Brandon (Inniss), (Jayden Ballard), Noah Rogers, Bryson (Rodgers) - all of these guys are going to have tremendous opportunities and it's going to excel them into next year."