

All-American Tackle Tandem Reflect On Two Seasons Together



Standing on opposite ends of the offensive line was a funny concept for Paris Johnson and Dawand Jones entering the season.

Sure, both players were at their most natural position, returning there in Johnson's case after a move back to left tackle following a year spent at right guard. But the duo had just gone a full season playing beside each other.

"I feel like I still keep the same kind of communication with Dawand," Johnson said. "I don't know how other left and right tackles really communicate with each other. But I think I'm so used to talking to him, whether it's in the huddle, whether it's a type of technique that I want to use, I'll talk to him all the time. So I know we're on the same page."

The resulting move to place Johnson at left tackle and Jones at right tackle yielded award-worthy dividends, however. At the conclusion of their third and fourth years at Ohio State, respectively, the duo each picked up some form of All-American honors.

Johnson and Jones' paths to the top tier of college football are quite distinct from one another.

Johnson came in with the expectation he'd be an All-American one day. The second-highest rated offensive line recruit in Ohio State history, per 247, the five-star Ohio product finished as the No. 9 prospect regardless of position in his recruiting class as the No. 1 offensive tackle.

Jones, on the other hand, was always a behemoth (currently 6-8, 360) but came out of high school as an incredibly raw three-star prospect. There was a lot of tooling that had to be done before he could reach starter caliber, let alone pick up the accolades he's since obtained. He's had to shed some bad weight and make other serious changes to his game.

"When you're heavier, it takes a toll on you," Jones said in August. "Everything's slower, your body moves slow. When you move slow on the field, you can't really move, get out like that. You're going against these guys that are 6-7, 260 like Zach (Harrison), they're running a 4.9 or whatever he runs. Fast, I know that for sure. He's getting off the ball. You can't be 370 and think you're going to block him."

The duo each landed starting roles on OSU's 2021 offensive line, with Johnson sliding inside in part to make way for Jones, who had such a big camp at tackle the coaching staff felt it had to get him on the field. Thayer Munford, a multi-year starter at tackle for Ohio State, also moved inside to left guard while Nicholas Petit-Frere kicked over from right to left tackle to open up the right tackle spot Jones has spent the last two seasons playing.

Johnson and Jones both picked up second-team All-Big Ten honors, Jones from the media and Johnson from the coaches, for their efforts that season. Then came the big change to set the starting lineup for 2022 — moving Johnson over to left tackle as Petit-Frere departed for the NFL.

Obviously Johnson's switch wasn't as difficult a process for Jones. He simply got a new running mate at right guard. It was Johnson who had to switch positions, even if he started his career at Ohio State as a tackle.

"If I try to rush the process to become the best left tackle in the nation in this practice, I'm going to rush the picture and I'm going to get away from it," Johnson said in April. "So each day I have things I write down, and those are the things that are my focus. And then next, in practice, I check that off my list. And then and after I accomplish that, I work on the consistency of that."

He leaned on Jones, in part, to help make the switch.

"Just as an older guy, he asks me a lot of questions, knowing that I have experience playing that position," Jones said in August.

It didn't prove to be much of an issue for Johnson. After becoming a unanimous first-team All-Big Ten selection, Johnson earned first-team All-American honors from the AFCA, The Athletic, Bleacher Report and Walter Camp. The AP and CBS Sports each had him second-team.

For Jones it was first-team All-American recognition from CBS Sports and Pro Football Focus, with second-team honors via the AP and Sporting News.

"We talked about it (us both being All-Americans) a little bit," Johnson said. "We had a team meeting one day, and the way we took, the path we took to the offensive line room — we were looking at the wall and saw the spaces on the wall for for the next people, and we were talking about how crazy it is that we'll both have the opportunity to have a picture on the wall and have a tree here."

While Johnson and Jones haven't made their plans for the 2023 NFL Draft public yet, it seems likely both are gone. Jones stated earlier this season that he was close to leaving for last year's draft but wanted to come back and improve his draft stock. Johnson is the No. 14 draft prospect on the big board of ESPN's Mel Kiper, a likely first-rounder.

The All-American tandem do get one final shot to bolster their legacy at Ohio State, however, as the rest of the team does. It comes in the College Football Playoff, beginning Dec. 31 in the semi-finals at the Peach Bowl against Georgia.

"We've got another chance," Jones said. "A new lease on life."