

Ohio State Wide Receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba Will Not Play In Peach Bowl



What could have been Ohio State's top weapon for third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud in the 2022 season will officially never be realized.

Third-year wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba, who posted a school-record 347 receiving yards in the Rose Bowl to cap a 95-reception, 1,606-yard season (both also school records), will forego any hopes of playing in the 2022 Chic-fil-A Peach Bowl against No. 1 Georgia and instead begin preparations for the 2023 NFL Draft following an ongoing injury.

"I want to thank Jaxon for all he has done for our Ohio State program," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said. "He has had such a major impact here in Columbus, on and off the field, in a relatively short period of time. We all know he has a very bright future ahead of him and we all support him as he moves forward with his career."

Smith-Njigba suffered a hamstring injury in the Buckeyes' first contest of the season against Notre Dame. After sitting out the next week against Arkansas State, he attempted to return in a limited capacity against Toledo but re-aggravated the injury.

That led to OSU keeping him sidelined until the above-mentioned game against the Hawkeyes, where Smith-Njigba pulled up lame after failing to haul in a pass down the sidelines, limping back to the team's bench. He hasn't played in any of the five games since.

On the season, during which he played five total quarters, Smith-Njigba had five receptions for 43 yards.

"I did everything possible to put myself in a position to get back on the field multiple times this year," Smith-Njigba said in a statement on Twitter. "I wanted it as much, if not more than anyone else. After consulting with my doctors, it has been determined that I will not be able to play in the playoffs. Having

prayed on it with my family, I have decided to focus on getting 100 percent healthy and commit to my training for the next chapter in my football journey. I am officially declaring for the 2023 NFL Draft.”

Smith-Njigba also took some time in the statement to articulate what OSU’s program has meant to him.

“As a young kid from Texas, I’ve always dreamed of playing football on the biggest stage. It’s humbling to think that I eventually did play not only on the biggest stage in college football, but also surrounded by the best group of people... my teammates, coaches, training staff, Coach Mick (Marotti’s) whole team, students, professors, tutors, chefs, Buckeye Nation, of course, The Best Damn Band in the Land, everyone in the Woody along with those that always pushed me to be great. Thank you for being part of my life and turning into people I’ll call family forever.”

While Smith-Njigba won’t make his return, other Ohio State players who have either been playing through injuries or sidelined by them should be healed up by the time the Buckeyes meet the Bulldogs Dec. 31. Day is excited to have a full complement back on both sides of the ball.

“Everybody else, I think we should have,” Day said. “That (injuries) was a little bit part of the story this year, and to be at full strength or almost at full strength is going to be important to go beat these guys. So yeah, great to get a couple of weeks and even last week, got a little bit more rest.”