

Keenan Bailey Building Options Behind Cade Stover At Tight End



Anyone who follows the team knows who Ohio State's starting tight end will be in 2023.

Senior Cade Stover makes his return after catching more passes than any Buckeye tight end since Rickey Dudley in 1995, hauling in 36 passes for 406 yards and five touchdowns last season. He's stayed as hungry as ever during this offseason.

"Last year (with Stover), it was, 'Here's a blocking guy that doesn't know how to get open.' That was the noise — that we didn't believe — but that was the noise coming from the outside," tight ends coach Keenan Bailey said. "He put in work like I had never seen before, and he's doing the same thing now. So I think what's jumped out at me is that consistency."

What Ohio State's newest position coach, who has been in the program for several years as a graduate assistant, is trying to build is depth beyond Stover. Seniors Joe Royer and Gee Scott were backups last year and obvious candidates to see the field either to spell Stover or in multiple-tight end sets, but Bailey is laser-focused on getting the most out of each of his eight players in the position room.

"It's just a good time to develop everybody," Bailey said. "Everybody knows we have one of the best tight ends in the country coming back, so now it's time to find out who else can compete at a championship level. That's the standard around here."

Beyond Royer and Scott, redshirt freshman Bennett Christian has begun making strides as he enters his second year in the program. He, redshirt sophomore Sam Hart and freshman Jelani Thurman will be vying to be the next man up after Stover, Royer and Scott.

"Bennett's not a young guy anymore, and that's what I reminded him of," Bailey said. "So I'm challenging him to be more of a leader. I think his mindset's changed the most. It's not just going through the motions, he's so intentional now and understanding the offense."

Speaking of Thurman, the third-ranked tight end in the class of 2023 has been living up to his recruiting billing early in his career, making waves and losing his black stripe during spring practice. All while finally graduating high school.

Likely more of a piece for the future, his early progression is one Bailey loves seeing.

“In spring, there was a lot of ‘What do I do? What do I have on this play, what do I have to do on a Tuesday morning, what classroom building do I have to go to,’” Bailey said. “Now it’s the how and the why. ‘How do I do my job? How do I become a successful student-athlete?’ And the why, ‘Why do I have to be here 25 minutes before I’m supposed to? Why do I have to influence with my right step so that (the defender) steps down?’ So it’s just progressing from the what to the how to the why.”

As of yet, despite its depth the tight end room has not seen any of its players enter the transfer portal while OSU has rearranged its scholarship numbers to get down to the 85-man limit.

That same talent around them is what keeps his players invested, though, Bailey said. His players want to compete and win roles in Columbus.

“They came to Ohio State knowing that everyone is a competitor, everyone came here to be a first-rounder,” Bailey said. “I don’t think there’s any waiting for your time. I don’t ever want to coach somebody who’s patient. So I hope they’re all hungry to get on the field right now.”