

Burke Eyes Bounce-Back Junior Season



Denzel Burke entered the 2022 season riding high off of a promising freshman campaign in the Ohio State secondary.

Burke started all 13 of Ohio State's games as a freshman while picking up freshman All-American honors from ESPN and The Athletic after leading the Buckeyes with 12 pass-breakups. As expectations rose ahead of his sophomore season, Burke struggled to keep up as injuries hampered his ability to produce at the same level he did as a freshman.

Now a junior, Burke knows what's at stake entering the third season as a Buckeye and has adjusted his approach in order to get back on track this campaign.

"Going into this year, it's a personal year for me," Burke said. "I want to prove all the doubters wrong. I'm going to go out there and do what I know I can do and put a lot of great stuff on tape and play hard for my team."

Upon his arrival on campus as an early enrollee in January 2021, Burke was an immediate impact player for Ohio State. During Ohio State's season-opener against Minnesota, he became the first true freshman to start on defense for the Buckeyes since Andy Katzenmoyer in 1996, showing a clear level of trust between him and the coaching staff.

Burke proved that trust was well-warranted when he tallied 36 tackles and an interception while emerging as an All-Big Ten third-team honoree during the season.

Entering his sophomore campaign, there was no doubt that Burke would reclaim his starting spot, even though he battled injuries throughout fall camp and carried limited practice reps into the season. But it was clear the injuries hampered Burke during the early stages of the season, as he was on the opposite end of several long passing plays and a pair of touchdowns across the Buckeyes' first three games.

In all, Burke wound up missing a pair of games last season while also undergoing hand surgery prior to Ohio State's Sept. 24 game against Wisconsin. But, now he's back at full physical strength.

“(It impacted me) a lot. Physically, I couldn’t do a lot of things,” Burke said. “I had a shoulder (injury), I had an ankle (injury), the hand and fingers. So, I’m healthy this year, and thank God.”

Burke added the injuries also had a mental toll on him, noting that he fell out of rhythm with his typical routine.

“When I’m out, I’m not able to set my foundation and be able to do my technique,” Burke said. “Going out there and playing, I hadn’t really set my foundation so a lot of things are off. Then, I have to think about some of my injuries and having to find a way to play with my injuries.”

As Burke eyes a campaign of strong health, cornerbacks coach Tim Walton said Burke will also be relied on as a leader in the secondary due to his experience in the program.

“He’s the guy that has the playing experience. He’s the guy that’s been around the longest, so you now have to lead the young guys by example and verbally,” Walton said. “We just have to take the next step in that and grow.”

While Burke is looking to elevate himself back to the level he played at as a freshman, while carrying that newfound leadership responsibility, he recognized that it’s on him to help bring the Ohio State secondary back to prominence.

“We just want to show that BIA is back and we’re not leaving nothing to chance this year,” Burke said. “I’m really excited.”