

Emeka Egbuka, Jayden Ballard To Assume Most Of Punt, Kick Return Duties This Season



Ohio State's specialists were rounded out on Wednesday night when head coach Ryan Day named wide receivers Emeka Egbuka and Brandon Inniss as punt returners, with fellow receivers Jayden Ballard and Carnell Tate returning kicks.

"(Ballard) is going to take the first kickoff return, and Carnell is also going to be right there. Those are our two guys there," Day said during his media availability Wednesday night. "We're a little bit by committee in the back end on punt returning, Brandon Inniss is there and Emeka is there, we have a few guys there that we can use."

Egbuka is the most experienced returner of the group, leading the Big Ten with a kickoff return average of 29 yards as a true freshman in 2021. Ballard, meanwhile, had a solid year returning punts for the Buckeyes in 2023, going for 49 return yards on nine tries.

Egbuka, who had 98 yards on 18 punt returns over the last two years, knows the challenges that come with being a punt returner.

"Punt return though, it's not even close, it's way harder to catch, especially wind all of that type of stuff, if it's a spiral, if it's not a spiral, the ball is kind of moving sporadically... kick return you kind of know where the ball is going to be," Egbuka said. "They're definitely both intimidating options but intimidating for different reasons, but you kind of just have to stand bold in the face of those adversities and do what you know."

With a revamped special teams' coaching staff, Egbuka and the rest of the returners will hope to generate the first return touchdown Ohio State has had since 2014.