

‘Excited’ For Return From Season-Ending Foot Injury, WR Austin Mack Looks To Lead Ohio State Offense

After he saw his junior season cut short late in October due to surgery on his left foot, wide receiver Austin Mack made the most of spring camp and now eyes an impactful senior campaign when Ohio State’s transitional year under head coach Ryan Day gets underway.

The 6-2, 215-pounder hopes to pick up where he left off midway through his eight-game 2018 season. Despite the injury, he still finished fifth among the Buckeyes’ receivers with 26 catches for 331 yards (12.7 average) and a touchdown.

“I’m on my two feet,” Mack said with a smile last Friday at OSU’s seventh annual job fair. “But I’m healthy. I’m excited for the season. It’s going to really be a fun season, trying to stay healthy, doing rehab every day. But it’s really just focusing on getting stronger and faster.”

With the start of summer workouts recently, Mack has balanced a busy course load on and off the field.

Between multiple internships, an undergraduate major in consumer and family financial services and involvement with Redefining Athletic Standards at Ohio State, Mack makes additional time for continual development from the weight room to the practice field.

Part of the process has included the Buckeyes’ transition at quarterback from 2018 starter Dwayne Haskins — Mack’s roommate — to two immediately eligible transfers in sophomore Justin Fields and junior Gunnar Hoak via Georgia and Kentucky.

“To be honest, I never really cared who’s our quarterback unless he gets you the ball,” Mack said. “But now, I’ve started to grow with (Fields). It’s different having a younger quarterback. Before, I had J.T. Barrett and then Dwayne, who was in my (2016 recruiting) class. I’ve always had a guy who’s a little more older. So a guy who’s young — it’s different, but it’s been fun. He’s a guy who brings a different edge to our offense and he’s really brought a lot of maturity these few months.”

Fields emerged as OSU’s likely starter out of spring camp after redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin transferred out, but Hoak’s late-April entrance gives the offense another option while the position group reloads.

Among the veterans set to return at wide receiver at H-back, Mack headlines the bunch as an experienced senior.

The leadership trickles down to the rest of the offense, where Mack and the offensive weapons will have a new signal caller throwing the ball their way when they line up in the fall.

“I think the biggest thing was really just getting (Fields) comfortable,” Mack said. “It’s his offense. Whenever he’s in the huddle, the quarterback — whoever it is — coming out, it’s their offense. So for us, as the receivers, it’s just about getting him more comfortable and getting him more vocal to just

know that we're going to be at the right spot at the right time."

As fall camp inches closer with Big Ten media days scheduled for July 18-19 in Chicago, Mack takes on the leadership vacancy after fifth-year seniors Parris Campbell, Johnnie Dixon and Terry McLaurin graduated to the NFL.

Still getting used to being more vocal, Mack admits that he has undergone adaptation ahead of his final fall in Columbus.

But before he closes his career with the 2019 campaign, Mack — who has 52 receptions for 689 yards (13.3 average) and three touchdowns in 34 games from 2016-18 — embraces the overall process.

"It went by like a flash," Mack said. "Looking back at it, there's a lot of things that you wish you could do better. There's a lot of things that you want to redo. But the biggest thing is, like, how can I be better every single day? That's all we talk about, maximizing each and every day, because time is not limitless. We're running out of time as we speak, so how can I maximize every single time that I'm awake?"

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