

Former Ohio State Wide Receiver Xavier Johnson Signed By Buffalo Bills As Undrafted Free Agent



Former Ohio State wide receiver Xavier Johnson has earned an opportunity to play for a roster spot in the NFL after not being selected in this year's draft, signing as an undrafted free agent with the Buffalo Bills.

.@OhioStateFB WR Xavier Johnson Jr. is signing with the #Bills, per source.
pic.twitter.com/5XfQ94FKpe

— Jordan Schultz (@Schultz_Report) April 27, 2024

Johnson, who played six seasons for the Buckeyes and primarily served as a running back and wideout, was not expected to be drafted, as he did not appear in many offseason mock drafts and failed to receive an invite to the NFL Scouting Combine. This reality did bother Johnson, though, who said after Ohio State's Pro Day that it is just another hurdle he will have to cross in an adversity-filled career and life.

"For me, it's been the situation my entire life where I've just been in an uphill battle," he said. "And I think the Lord puts things in front of you and allows you to show how much you actually trust him. So for me, it wasn't a situation where I shied away or I tucked my tail, got down in the dumps. It's like, 'OK, I just have to work harder. I have to continue to trust (God).' And it was an opportunity for me to really put my money where my mouth is."

Johnson, a Cincinnati Summit Country Day School product, was a largely overlooked high school prospect, where he was tabbed as the nation's 1,138th-best prospect and 170th-best wide receiver. While he did garner some scholarship offers, Johnson instead opted to walk-on at Ohio State ahead of the 2018 season, joining a crowded Ohio State offense that then included established wide receivers K.J. Hill and Terry McLaurin along with running backs J.K. Dobbins and Mike Weber.

Johnson attempted to make his presence known as a walk-on early on in his career by playing multiple different positions, lining up at wide receiver, running back, special teams and even cornerback. This allowed him to lose his black stripe under then-head coach Urban Meyer in 2018 and become an "official" member of the team.

Johnson continued to make waves on head coach Ryan Day's early teams, mostly on special teams, where he spent the majority of the 2019 and 2020 seasons on kickoff coverage and returns. He also earned some game reps at running back in that span, totaling four rushes for 17 yards in 2020.

Johnson's willingness to play different positions earned him a scholarship ahead of the 2021 season, a year in which he committed to playing mostly at wide receiver along with his usual role on special teams. He did not record a statistic at wideout that season as he sat behind future NFL players Jaxon Smith-Njigba, Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson, but he did continue to flash on special teams, appearing in all 13 games and totaling four tackles.

Johnson finally earned significant playing time on Ohio State's offense in 2022, where he served as a versatile weapon at both receiver and running back, finishing with 12 carries for 146 yards and two touchdowns and 13 catches for 151 yards and another two scores. He also had perhaps his best moment in his six-year Buckeye career when he scored a 37-yard receiving touchdown in Ohio State's College Football Semifinal loss to Georgia, which gave the Buckeyes a 28-24 halftime lead.

Johnson carried that momentum into his sixth and final season with the Buckeyes, where he was named last summer as one of three team captains, and also received the distinguished "Block O" jersey, which recognizes the Buckeye who exhibits the most toughness, accountability and high character. He had a career statistical year while donning No. 0, totaling 190 rushing yards on 28 attempts and 368 receiving yards on 41 receptions, while also serving as Ohio State's kick returner and adding another 250 yards on 11 returns.

"I've given a lot to this program, and a lot has been given to me, so I'm incredibly grateful," Johnson said after Ohio State's Cotton Bowl loss to Missouri, which marked the end of the wideout's career. "It's surreal. I don't want it to end, in a way, but I'm thankful. It's kind of well-documented throughout the process. There was a lot of doubt, a lot of hard times, a lot of tears, but when I look back over my career, I just really see the faithfulness of the Lord."

Johnson will now look to overcome another obstacle in the NFL and make a similar rise up the Bills depth chart.