

Jyaire Brown and JK Johnson Talk First Starts



The top three cornerbacks on Ohio State's depth chart were all down against Wisconsin Saturday.

Graduate Cam Brown, sophomore Denzel Burke and sophomore Jordan Hancock were all sidelined against the Badgers due to injuries, leaving just three scholarship corners available to Ohio State. Sophomore JK Johnson and freshman Jyaire Brown, the latter of which just arrived in Columbus this spring, were forced to make their first starts.

If the numbers posted by Wisconsin junior quarterback Graham Mertz were any indication — Mertz went 11-of-20 for a mere 94 yards with one touchdown against one interception — Johnson and Brown filled in admirably.

"They stepped up big time," graduate safety Tanner McCalister said. "Obviously, when you've got Cam Brown and Denzel down, going into preparation it's kind of scary a little bit just because those guys haven't played much. But they came in comfortable, willing to listen."

Johnson collected four tackles over the course of the game. He didn't enter the contest placing any pressure on himself, rather just focusing on his assignment play-to-play.

"I was just out there, that's all I wanted to do," Johnson said. "I didn't really have any expectations but to fly around and do my job, for real."

Jyaire Brown had one tackle and held up well in pass coverage, adding one pass breakup to his stat line. His day wasn't all smooth-sailing, however.

A pass interference flag flew Brown's way on a ball over the head of the receiver he was covering, drawing a livid reaction toward the official who threw it from Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on the sideline.

"I obviously didn't like what I saw," Day said. "I felt like that was a big play, but I also wanted Jyaire to know that I did have (his) back. If it was egregious, OK, move on, but I wanted to defend him in that moment."

McCalister noted that Brown is someone who's never afraid to go against the best of the best in Ohio State's practices, regularly lining up against sophomore wide receivers Emeka Egbuka and Marvin Harrison, Jr. He's been described as having a great deal of confidence about him.

Brown said it's a two-way street in those terms, however. He has assurance because he sees some of the nation's top wideouts while training.

"That confidence comes from practicing every day, going against the best receivers every day, seeing the best that you can see," Brown said. "Then getting into those games like that and going against other opponents, it's kind of initialized that. Because we see the best in the business every day, Zone 6."

Ohio State's more veteran defensive backs have taken notice of that approach from the freshman.

"I like Jyaire's mindset," fourth-year safety Ronnie Hickman said. "Since day one, he's had that edge to him, that grimey edge, that hard-working edge. So I knew that, when his time was called, when his number was called, he was going to be ready."

Day said he hopes to have Cam Brown and Burke back against Rutgers Oct. 1, while Hancock likely remains out. If all three aren't available, however, Ohio State now has confidence moving forward in its young tandem of Johnson and Jyaire Brown.