

No Need To Reload In Receivers Room



For a unit heralded as among the best at its position in the country, Ohio State's wide receivers room is only losing one player to the 2023 NFL Draft. And even that one player is only a loss in name.

With the questions surrounding the team's offensive line and defense, one thing is certain: Whomever is at quarterback for the Buckeyes next season will have a stocked cupboard of weapons to distribute the ball to.

Jaxon Smith-Njigba is the only OSU receiver going pro this spring. While there's no denying his talent — he broke the single-season school record for receptions and yards in 2021 — Smith-Njigba appeared in three total games due to injury this past year and didn't play more than two quarters in any of them, finishing his final campaign with five catches for 43 yards.

With graduate wideout Xavier Johnson and rising fifth-year tight end Cade Stover both announcing their returns to Columbus over the past week, 98 percent of the team's receiving production in terms of yardage is slated to be back in 2023.

It starts with rising third-year Marvin Harrison Jr. A finalist for the Biletnikoff Award, given annually to college football's best pass-catcher, in 2022, Harrison hauled in 77 balls for 1,263 yards and 14 touchdowns.

He's joined by rising third-year Emeka Egbuka, the No. 1 receiver in the nation for the 2021 recruiting class. Egbuka enjoyed a breakout 2022 campaign with 74 receptions for 1,151 yards and 10 touchdowns, mixing in both in the slot and out wide.

Rising fourth-year Julian Fleming makes it three for three on Ohio State starting receivers returning, a former five-star and No. 1 wideout from his class just as Egbuka was. Injuries have slowed his progression in the program but he finally saw some moderate success over the course of this past season, with 34 receptions for 533 yards and six scores. His career statline in Columbus reads 53-693-7.

Johnson may have only caught 13 passes for 151 yards last year, but his two touchdowns couldn't have come in bigger spots. He hauled in an eventual game-winner against then-No. 5 Notre Dame to open the season and closed it with a key touchdown entering halftime against No. 1 Georgia in the College Football Playoffs. He's shown versatility too, lining up in the backfield on a number of occasions as the team's running back depth took a hit.

That's without getting into the talent of the depth remaining on the OSU roster. All five of the other scholarship wideouts on the team are former four-star prospects, with three landing in the top 100 overall recruits from their respective classes.

Rising third-year Jayden Ballard is the most senior of the bunch, and did see some mop up duty in 2022 with eight receptions for 155 yards and three touchdowns, the bulk of that production coming on a 72-yard scoring catch against Toledo.

Four more freshmen are incoming from the 2023 recruiting class, with a five-star amongst them in Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) American Heritage's Brandon Inniss.

Truthfully, the only question for wide receivers coach Brian Hartline is how much to split reps amongst all the options he has.