

Ohio State Freshman Wide Receiver Jeremiah Smith Ignoring Hype, Ready To Show Capabilities With Buckeyes



Since arriving at Ohio State this winter as the nation's top-rated prospect and highest-ranked wide receiver prospect in a decade, freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith has earned universal praise from the program's elite, with Buckeye pass-catching legends such as Chris Carter and Marvin Harrison Jr. lauding his already elite traits, and All-Big Ten teammates Denzel Burke and Emeka Egbuka fawning over the wideout's uncanny professionalism.

This whirlwind of hype — which has even stretched out to the national scale this offseason — is rare for a player who has yet to take a collegiate snap, one that may rival any other incoming freshman in recent college football history.

While some wide-eyed freshmen may be overwhelmed by these lofty expectations, causing them to be distracted away from their overall development as student-athletes, Smith has decided to block out the noise.

Instead, the five-star is putting his head down and getting to work, a mentality that could put him on a fast-track to start at wide receiver come Week 1.

"I know there are big expectations coming in for me because (I'm) the No. 1 player coming in and all the hype around me," Smith said Friday morning at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center in his first official media appearance since joining the Buckeyes. "I just try to block out all of that stuff and just focus on the main thing — just the team and our receiver room and our locker room. When the first game comes, and I don't see the expectation that y'all have for me — I mean, I don't really care. I just want to go out there and win a game, That's it."

"You don't want that hype to affect you. I just keep my head down and find ways to get better each and every day."

Smith, who told the media that he blocks out the noise by staying away from social media, said that this workman-like mentality is something that has been instilled in him from a young age — mostly by his father, Chris Smith — where he learned to attack each challenge and moment with a type of humility

and maturity that is beyond his years.

“(My dad told me) to just be older, don’t act my age, act older than my age,” Smith said. “A lot of people tell me that I don’t act my age, I’m way beyond my years. I just have to be mature and don’t act like a kid.”

Smith’s maturity has seemingly radiated through the halls of the Woody Hayes Athletic, a trait that many around the program — including head coach Ryan Day and wide receivers coach/co-offensive coordinator Brian Hartline — have mentioned when asked about their early impressions of the freshman.

“He takes his game very, very seriously,” Day said on Thursday. “He puts that work in off the field, and if he doesn’t make the play, he’s hard on himself. (It’s) rare that you find somebody who’s as talented, but has really good discipline and skill at that age. We haven’t played a game yet, but he’s building a lot of respect amongst his teammates for sure.”

But while Smith’s already veteran-like approach to the game has earned himself the label as somewhat of a quiet assassin, the freshman made it known that he brings a much different mentality to the field.

The Miami Gardens, Fla., native said he has brought a fiery competitiveness to the gridiron since he was about eight or nine years old — a mentality that he said also comes from his father along with his cousin, current Seattle Seahawks starting quarterback Geno Smith — something that has only intensified since he arrived on campus this winter while going against what he called the two best cornerbacks in the nation, Burke and Davison Igbinosun.

This mentality was on full display at the tail end of Thursday’s practice, an approximately three-hour intense session that included numerous back-and-forth battles — both physically and verbally — between the offense and defense.

While the freshman has been described as fairly reserved by his teammates and coaches, it was Smith that was involved in one of the more notable trash-talking of the day. Smith’s moment came against the veteran Igbinosun — a common matchup for Smith this fall — who got the better of the five-star on a fade in the back of the end zone, and let him hear about it.

A few plays later, Smith got the last laugh, hauling in a contested catch over the diving Igbinosun for a long gain, and then letting his elder know about it shortly after.

“I did, I said something,” Smith said when asked to recount the sequence between him and Igbinosun. “When he deflected the ball, he said, ‘I’m here.’ And I said, ‘Okay, I’m going to be back.’ Then when I made a play...I said ‘I told you I’m coming back, right?’

It is this unique combination of competitiveness, humility and elite talent that has caused Smith to become one of the more hyped freshmen in Ohio State’s storied history, one which includes star receivers such as David Boston, Carter, Terry Glenn, Harrison and Michael Jenkins, among many others.

But Smith has no time to embrace the lofty expectations set on him. He’s only ready to validate them on the field.

"It's something great," Smith said when asked what it means to receive praise from former Buckeye wideouts. "I just have to go out there on the field and just show that I could be part of the great Ohio State receivers that have come through here. I mean, it's a blessing to have that. But I just have to go out there and play and show you guys."