

Ohio State Kick Return Unit Searching For First Touchdown In Over A Decade



At numerous points last season, Ohio State kick returner Emeka Egbuka appeared just one missed tackle away from ending the 12-year kick return touchdown drought that has plagued the Buckeyes.

While Ohio State's kick return unit was one of the best in the country a season ago, it continued its long stretch of seasons without a touchdown off a kickoff. The drought dates back to 2010, when Jordan Hall blazed past the Michigan kickoff unit for an 85-yard touchdown during the Buckeyes 37-7 triumph over the Wolverines.

With much of its core intact — including the return of Egbuka — the pieces appear to be in place for the Buckeyes to finally spring one loose and find pay-dirt.

"We're going to keep working," special teams coordinator Parker Fleming said. We have a great group of guys, a returning starter at kick returner who got close a few times last year, but close means nothing."

Despite being unable to find the end zone, Egbuka still proved he was one of the most dangerous kick returners in the Big Ten last season. He averaged 29.0 yards per return, which ranked No. 1 in the conference and was 3.6 yards more than No. 2 Charlie Jones of Iowa.

As Egbuka eyes a trip to the end zone by way of kick return this season, he said he is confident in the pieces they have in the unit to finish the job.

"I feel confident with the the returning people that we have on the kickoff return team, and the new people who have stepped up," Egbuka said. "We had great blocks last year and I'm very confident in us having great blocks again."

Against Maryland last season, Egbuka accounted for 166 kick return yards on four returns — including a career-long 67-yard return. But Egbuka's most important kick return came toward the end of the Rose Bowl. With 1:54 remaining in regulation and the game knotted at 45, Egbuka decided to return the kick-off from the five-yard line, in which he followed his blockers toward the right sideline and sprung free

before being wrapped up at the Ohio State 42-yard line. The 33-yard kick return set up the Buckeyes' game-winning drive, as kicker Noah Ruggles put the game on ice with a 19-yard field goal with less than 10 seconds to play.

While Egbuka was not able to find pay dirt in his first season as the Buckeyes' primary kick returner, Fleming said the ultimate goal of the unit is to put the offense in better position to score — something they accomplished on many occasions last season.

“At the end of the day, we really just want to have positive field position,” Fleming said. “If we make the last guy miss? That’s a big bonus. But we’re really trying to get drives started in the right way.”