

Ohio State Set To Match Up With Georgia's Dynamic Tight Ends



During the regular season, Ohio State's defense battled a plethora of top-tier tight ends. The Buckeyes saw relative success against Notre Dame All-American Michael Mayer and Iowa's Sam LaPorta — the reigning Big Ten Tight End of the Year — however, their most difficult challenge to date awaits them against Georgia in the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl on Dec. 31.

The Bulldogs trot out a pair of game-changing tight ends in the versatile Brock Bowers and Darnell Washington, who stands at 6-7. While the duo of Bowers and Washington have given opposing defenses fits all season, the Buckeyes are going to need to limit them as much as possible if they are to upset Georgia.

"Bowers can do so many things, he's very versatile," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said. "Darnell is really just a massive human being, who can just overwhelm you with his size and athleticism. The first thing is their versatility, second is their physicality. Anytime you can do multiple things as a receiver, running back or tight end, then you can create mismatches. And I think they both do that."

Georgia tends to play in 12 personnel often, placing Bowers and Washington on the field together for most of the team's offensive snaps. The Bulldogs have registered the third-most plays with two tight ends on the field this season, trailing just Vanderbilt and Ball State. A key factor of Georgia's ability to play both Bowers and Washington at a given time is the duo's complimentary skill sets.

Starting with Bowers, the reigning Mackey Award winner, he is a do-it-all offensive threat. He led Georgia in receptions (52), receiving yards (726) and touchdowns (six) while serving as quarterback Stetson Bennett's favorite target during the regular season. Bowers also made an impact as a rusher at certain points this season, rushing for 93 yards and three touchdowns — including a 77-yard, two-touchdown outing against Kent State on Sept. 24.

"He's almost like a receiver," Ohio State safety Tanner McCalister said. "He's just a bigger receiver. He

has a great catch radius. He's a pretty polished route runner for a tight end."

Washington is more of a bruiser, punishing opposing defenses with his blocking prowess and physicality while also registering a solid campaign as a pass-catcher. He hauled in 26 receptions for 417 yards and a pair of touchdowns on the season.

"He's a really big guy," McCalister said. "As a quarterback, I would just throw to him because of how big of a target he is. You can put it anywhere and he's able to catch it.

As Bowers and Washington both challenge the Buckeyes in distinct ways, McCalister said Ohio State's defense is keyed in on the duo ahead of the College Football Playoff semifinal bout in Atlanta.

"Both of those guys can hurt you defensively so that's definitely going to be a focus," McCalister said. "We've been watching film and we know what's coming so we'll be prepared."