

Ohio State's Tight End Depth Helping Offensive Flexibility Early On



Cade Stover earned most of the reps at tight end in both of the 2022 and 2023 seasons, excelling as both a pass catcher and a blocker at the college level, but now that he's a Houston Texan, there have been a lot of opportunities opened up for the entire depth chart to show off at the position.

Gee Scott Jr. has earned both starts for Ohio State through the first two games, but offensive coordinator Chip Kelly said the Buckeyes have been able to get creative with their personnel because of how many tight ends are game ready, and that it has allowed them more flexibility in play calling.

"It has. And it's a credit to all of those guys. All playing time here is earned," Kelly said. "When you say, 'Hey, we're going to run three-tight end formations,' it's not just whatever three tight ends are there. That conversation comes up in staff meetings because we really believe in those guys and what they can do. (Scott, Jelani Thurman, Will Kacmarek and Bennett Christian) have really earned it, and we'll continue to work through some of those packages and see what's the best fit for those guys."

So far, Christian is leading the bunch in receiving yards with just one catch that went for a 55-yard touchdown when freshman Julian Sayin came into the game late against Western Michigan and found him trailing down the left side, but he has been the last of the four on the field normally.

Kacmarek has two catches for 7 yards, Scott has one catch for 5 yards and Thurman hasn't had a catch yet, but unlike Stove in the past couple of years, pass catching hasn't been what has made the tight ends so valuable.

One example was when the Buckeyes were on the goal line with TreVeyon Henderson in the backfield early in the game against the Broncos, and Kelly elected to send four tight ends onto the field for a jumbo formation, allowing them to block for Henderson, who was able to push his way behind the blockers for a 3-yard touchdown.

Ryan Day said that even though the tight ends are competing against each other, they also want to prove that when they are on the field together that they are one of the better personnel groups.

“Everyone is competing against each other, but there’s also that competition between personnel groups,” Day said. “You want to get on the field, and whether it’s 10, 11, 13 or even 14 (personnel), you guys are fighting for opportunities to get in the game and play. There’s a pride in each unit to be able to do that, and it’s a lot easier when you have more guys in a room.”

Games are going to start getting closer than the two matchups against MAC opponents were to begin the season, so the coaches could get more strict with who is on the field in more important situations, but to this point, Day and Kelly have both been very happy with how the tight end group has shaped up.