

Previewing The Spring: Plenty Of Depth At Tight End As Bailey Takes Over



Buckeye Sports Bulletin is previewing every position on Ohio State's roster leading into the beginning of spring practice, which is set to begin on March 7. Check back every week day for a new breakdown on how the spring might play out for the Buckeyes.

Several assistant coaches on Ohio State's roster are looking to replace starters in their positions room, but the one room where that concept has been flipped on its head is the tight ends, where several established players are welcoming in a new position coach.

Keenan Bailey is entering his first season as tight ends coach after seven seasons on Ohio State's staff, taking over the position after former offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson left to become head coach at Tulsa.

"Everything's at my disposal," Bailey said earlier this month. "It's been awesome. I've got a lot of enthusiasm because I've been waiting pretty long for this opportunity. I'm just so eager to get going."

While Bailey could have been referring to the infrastructure at Ohio State at his disposal, it's also possible he meant the depth at tight end that he'll have the opportunity to coach. The Buckeyes welcome back a pair of senior Gee Scott Jr. and redshirt junior Joe Royer as well as Cade Stover, who elected to use a fifth season of eligibility to return to Ohio State.

Stover returns coming off one of the more impressive seasons by an Ohio State tight end in recent memory, hauling in 36 receptions for 406 yards and five touchdowns, and Bailey said there is plenty for the Mansfield, Ohio, native to work on entering what is likely his final season of college football.

"He'll be the first one to tell you," Bailey said. "He can go down as one of the better tight ends to come through this place, which is certainly something to be said. We talk about legacy. From the day you are recruited, we talk about goals, and we did not hit those goals last year. For a guy from Ohio to not hit those goals as a starter is huge. I think that helped Cade coming back."

The lone loss for the room is fullback/tight end Mitch Rossi, who exhausted his eligibility following this

past season. While not quite the receiving threat of other tight ends in the room, Rossi was a voracious blocker for Ohio State and helped in short-yardage situations.

Nobody in the tight end room is quite built like Rossi's 6-1, 250-pound stature, so it's unlikely that anyone in the room will be asked to replace him, but it's notable loss for Ohio State in terms of potential creativity on offense, as well as losing his blocking ability.

Scott and Royer are next up behind Stover, with the definitive backup yet to be settled. Scott saw the field more last season, appearing in 12 games with five receptions for 28 yards and a touchdown, but perhaps his most notable play of the season was headbutting a Michigan defender, moving the Buckeyes back in their eventual loss to the Wolverines.

Royer did not see the field as often, appearing in just five games, but he did step up and make a reception in the Peach Bowl against Georgia. It's a potential signifier of the trust Ohio State has in the Cincinnati native, showing that he and Scott both have an argument to back up Stover this season or share the field in two-tight end sets.

Sam Hart and Bennett Christian round out the returning scholarship players, and Ohio State also adds freshman Jelani Thurman, who could immediately compete for playing time.

"It's a deep room full of versatile guys, starting with Cade," Bailey said. "Joe, Gee, all those guys...I mean, they're the most gifted athletes in the country. We're Ohio State, so the sky's the limit."

Projected Depth Chart

| # | Yr. | Name |
|----|-------|-------------------|
| 8 | R-Sr. | Cade Stover |
| 88 | Sr. | Gee Scott Jr. |
| 84 | R-Jr. | Joe Royer |
| 85 | So. | Bennett Christian |