

Tight End Jelani Thurman Took Advantage Of Developmental Freshman Year At Ohio State



Ohio State tight end Jelani Thurman arrived on the scene last year with high expectations, as the physically imposing freshman looked the part of a dominant tight end that would factor in the Buckeyes' plans at the position.

But Thurman wound up appearing in just five games - including his first-career start in the Cotton Bowl - as Cade Stover and Gee Scott Jr. earned the majority of snaps at tight end, allowing Thurman to redshirt and utilize the season as one to sit back and learn from those in front of him.

"Of course you want to come in and play, but obviously if you have somebody in front of you that's doing the job, getting the job done, why not let them do that?" he said on Thursday. "I'm here to win as a Buckeye, not just get in and play and try to be selfish."

In the midst of his second spring at Ohio State, Thurman feels the redshirt year has greatly benefited him, allowing him to improve nearly every aspect of his game as he looks to grab a bigger role with the Buckeyes this season.

"I feel like I'm better at every aspect of the game now that I've sat back and learned from the guys," he said. "They fixed my technique up a little bit better, better at catching, better at blocking, better at the overall game."

Much of that improvement has come in his blocking. It's an area where Thurman said he did not have much experience coming out of high school given that he was mostly a receiving tight end at Langston Hughes in Fairburn, Ga. - also the school where freshman quarterback Air Noland hails - but he's taken to that aspect of the game since he arrived on campus.

"(I bring) versatility, a lot of playmaking, a lot of down and dirty blocks, because I have gotten better at blocking," he said. "... Blocking, just knowing you can physically move a man even though he knows you're coming. That's how blocking is, knowing you can get your running back to the end zone just by cutting somebody off."

Scott, transfer Will Kacmarek and senior Patrick Gurd figure to take the majority of snaps at tight end

this season, but at 6-6 and 258 pounds, Thurman is not meant to be taken lightly. Even if he begins the season only seeing the field in limited action, he is ready to step up when his number is called.

“(My freshman year) was basically just a developmental year. Learning from the older guys, actually getting in there a little bit,” he said. “I had a few plays during the season, but just learning, sitting back and getting ready for my year.”