

ASU

OL Joey Ramos ready for do-over season at Arizona State

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A year ago Joey Ramos talked excitedly about coming back home and being able to finish out his college eligibility by playing in front of his friends and family after transferring from Iowa State.

His return didn't exactly go as planned.

The 6-foot-5, 305-pound lineman sustained a broken ankle in the season-opening win against Northern Arizona and was lost for the season. Now, the Deer Valley High School product gets a do-over of that senior season.

Ramos says he knew right away the injury was a serious one. He had surgery a week after the game and was then in a walking boot for another two months.

"I knew it wasn't good just because I felt a pop and I was like, 'That's going numb. That's probably not good.' I looked down and made sure my foot wasn't sideways. As soon as I saw it wasn't sideways I was like, OK, I can get up and get off the field. But I knew it wasn't good."

Despite the injury Ramos says he tried to remain positive around his teammates by offering advice and providing motivation. He'd sit in on team meetings and film sessions just as if he were an active participant.

"I tried not to see it as a huge bummer," he said. "It was an unfortunate event that happened. It opened my eyes to just kind of giving back to the other guys. I didn't want to drag down the team. My main focus was, obviously do my rehab, but I made sure when I was around the facility I was giving back as much as I could."

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Ramos says he had no setbacks and is completely healthy as the Sun Devils go through their third week of spring practices.

"It's been smooth," he said of his rehabilitation. "I was down for about three and a half months but I did my time, made sure I dominated that recovery. I didn't let it affect me too much around the other guys. My main focus was get healthy and get back to the team."

It is ASU's first spring under head coach Kenny Dillingham. The offense has shown signs of explosiveness, particularly with the wide receivers it can deploy in the passing game. The biggest question mark, other than who will win the starting quarterback nod, appears to be the offensive line, which will boast at least four new starters. Des Holmes and Chris Martinez graduated and LaDarius Henderson and Ben Scott hit the transfer portal, winding up at Michigan and Nebraska respectively.

The lone returning fulltime starter is junior left tackle Isaia Glass, although senior Emmit Bohle moved into the starting lineup when Henderson got hurt midway through the season.

Quarterbacks: Trenton Bourguet thrives as role of underdog at ASU

New offensive line coach Saga Tuitele says Ramos is very much the leader of the unit.

"He has done a great job of leading. With so much turnover between coaches and players he's done a great job of making sure that everyone feels like they're a Sun Devil," Tuitele said, after the Sun Devils wrapped up drills on Tuesday. "That's the thing I love. He's worked on his body. Usually when a lineman suffers a lower body injury he tends to gain weight. And he didn't. He has a great attitude and just brings that edge and more importantly, he's getting those guys to hang out together so they can learn each other, develop that chemistry."

"When you have that turnover you worry about that bond. You want them to learn about each other. He's local guy, so he spearheads that as far as coming up with things they want to do together whether it's paint balling or mini golfing. He's doing things to bring that group together and that's part of his growth."

Tuitele says it's hard to tell where his unit stands because he hasn't had his full complement of players. California transfer Ben Coleman was penciled in at one of the guard spots, but Dillingham already confirmed he will miss at least a portion of the season

guard spots, but Dillingham already committed he will miss at least a portion of the season with a lower body injury.

Two other transfers the Sun Devils were counting on heavily — Bram Walden (from Oregon) and Aaron Frost (Nevada) — have missed some time too.

Among the other new additions is Leif Fautanu, a former starter at UNLV who could be the starting center come the opening game on Aug. 28. Red Mountain alum Ben Bray also got some playing time there last year when Scott got injured.

There is an old saying that you can never have enough linemen, and Dillingham hinted that it is a position where he may have to look to add bodies once he can re-evaluate the personnel with the conclusion of spring drills.

"You have to have eight offensive linemen going into a season that you can play with. You have too," Dillingham said "And that's bare minimum number. If you don't go into the year with eight guys you feel like you can play, you're in trouble because you're going to play all eight. And you can't hide an O lineman. You can't say, 'Hide over there, you're the left guard,' because you're the second closet dude to the football. You can't say, 'Let me hide the left tackle.' It's the one position you can't hide. So you have to have eight."

Asked if he was at that minimum, the coach replied without hesitation.

"No. We're not there yet."

Ramos said he is pleased with where his unit is at from a teamwork perspective and he's happy to the stabilizing influence.

"I do see myself as maybe the veteran but I have other good guys around me. We're all one big family right now. It's the tightest this offensive line has been in a while. Everyone loves each other and we have all bonded. I'm glad to have these guys here," he said. "All the extra stuff we do outside of football. We're a unit on the field. That has an aspect to it but we're also a unit off the field. We get treatment together, we're watching film together. Our focus was, the faster we can get to know each other on different levels, the faster we can become a unit on the field."

Jacobs excelling

The Sun Devils have been a bit banged up at running back with Tevin White and George

Hart both missing some practices. So, sophomore Javen Jacobs has been moved from slot receiver to the backfield for some drills. He was a versatile player in high school and accustomed to having the ball in his hands.

Jacobs, a product of Saguaro High School, has had to sit in on meetings for both positions and learn the plays for both.

"The running back room is so genuine. They welcomed me in right away. Everybody's willing to help me out, any questions I have they're there to help me right away," said Jacobs, who joined the team as a walk-on but is now on scholarship. "I am picking it up pretty fast and having fun with the process."

Odds and ends

Among those taking in practice was former ASU offensive coordinator Zak Hill, now the head coach at Saguaro High School. Also in attendance was Athletic Director Ray Anderson.

The next practice is scheduled for Thursday and will be the 11th of the 15.