

Bears wideout Odunze says his ‘foot feels great’

BY SEAN HAMMOND
Chicago Tribune

CHICAGO

Rome Odunze’s foot is not an issue.

The third-year Chicago Bears wide receiver wanted to make that clear after practice Thursday at Halas Hall. Odunze, 24, had said in the spring he was adjusting to his “new normal” after a foot injury kept him out for five games last year.

Upon reflection, Odunze said Thursday he didn’t articulate his thoughts well with that previous comment.

“I just kind of meant that I had an injury (last season),” Odunze said. “That’s it. That’s football. My foot feels great. My foot feels amazing.”

Odunze elected not to have surgery on the stress fracture in his left foot. He



STACEY WESCOTT TNS

Bears wide receiver Rome Odunze hauls in a pass during training camp on Wednesday. Odunze made it clear on Thursday that last year’s foot issues are behind him.

was a full participant during the spring practice period as well as the first two practices of training

camp.

Odunze, the No. 9 pick in the 2024 draft, first appeared on the injury

report in late October last season. He continued to play through the injury for a while. During that time,

he was the clear No. 1 target in the offense with 44 catches for 661 yards and six touchdowns through the first 12 games - on pace for just shy of 1,000 yards.

The Bears shut him down for the final five regular-season games in order to get his foot right for the playoffs. Despite the extended absence, Odunze led the team with 90 targets for the season. He returned for the post-season, recording two catches for 44 yards in both games.

In June, Odunze said his foot was back to 100% healthy, but he indicated it didn’t necessarily feel the same as before.

“This is my new normal,” Odunze said June 3 during organized team activities. “And it’s not from a standpoint that I’m always in pain, but the way my foot broke, there’s calluses in there that creates a different type of foot structure with those bones - different types of things that kind of shift things around. So my new normal was kind of what I am going into.”

He said Thursday that

those comments came off wrong and that he’s at a point where he doesn’t even think about his foot anymore when he’s on the field.

“I know ‘new normal’ - that has a bunch of connotations of chronic and severe, like it’s never going to be the same,” Odunze said. “It’s not like that at all. I’m completely fine. I went through my process of recovery and rehab and it’s been great. I do my due diligence and all those things.”

With DJ Moore gone, Odunze and Luther Burden III are the top two wide receivers in coach Ben Johnson’s offense. Offensive coordinator Press Taylor said Thursday that Odunze looks great on the field.

“He looks like he’s moving around really well,” Taylor said. “If he hadn’t said anything, I don’t know that you necessarily would have noticed through the spring the way he was moving because he looks like he’s moving really well. And we’re excited to see what Rome does through this training camp.”

Indiana ready for more after historic ‘25 season

Field Level Media

The Indiana football team got to take quite a victory lap this offseason.

A national championship is always sweet, but it probably tasted that much better coming from a program that was the losingest in college football history at this time last year.

After the Hoosiers reveled in finishing off the first 16-0 season in modern college football history, coach Curt Cignetti is ready for more.

“I’m really excited. I’ve been on vacation long enough,” Cignetti said Thursday at Big Ten media days in Chicago. “I’m tired of being bossed around by my wife. I’m ready to boss somebody else around and develop a football team.”

Cignetti made historic basketball power Indiana into a football juggernaut overnight, posting a 27-2 record over his first two seasons, nearly as many wins as the 28 the program had in the six years before his arrival combined.

But after last year’s team proved its bona fides with six wins over top-10 opponents, this year’s team has some new faces that will need to step up.

Most notably, after Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Fernando Mendoza was the No. 1 pick in the NFL Draft in April, TCU transfer Josh Hoover is stepping in. Hoover completed 65.2% of his passes over the past three seasons for 9,629 yards, 71 touchdowns and 33 interceptions.

Standout receivers Omar Cooper Jr. and Elijah Saratt are also gone, replaced by productive Michigan State transfer Nick Marsh.

Amid the turnover, Cignetti doesn’t believe much will change.

Kyle Whittingham, who left Utah in December after 21-plus seasons and a program-record 177 wins, was hired to guide the team through the tumultuous period of turnover.

Whittingham said of the Michigan players, “They’re hungry and ready to get back in a season, get some football. They’ve been through a lot in the last four or five years. Hopefully, we can put the drama to bed and just get back to being student-athletes and having a great college experience.”

Quarterback Bryce Underwood taking a step forward in Year 2 with the program would make things easier for Whittingham. The No. 1 overall recruit in the 2025 class, Underwood didn’t have the most impressive stat line as a true freshman (60.3% completion rate, 2,428 yards, 11 passing TDs, nine interceptions with 392 rushing yards and six TDs) but still managed to lead Michigan to nine wins.

Underwood feels more confident after training alongside Cincinnati Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow, a former Heisman Trophy winner, this off-season.

NEBRASKA

Matt Rhule brought a level of stability that had been missing at Nebraska in his first three years atop the program.

After the Cornhuskers had seven straight losing seasons from 2017-23, Nebraska won seven games in both 2024 and ‘25.

Standing alongside three national championship trophies after a different Big Ten team won it all in each of the past three seasons, Rhule made it clear he is not yet close to what he wants to accomplish in Lincoln.

“I stood up here a few years ago saying before we can talk about doing great things, we have to earn back the respect. These (players), they kind of erased the narratives,” Rhule said. “... We know that’s not enough. We didn’t come to Nebraska to go 7-6. We came to compete for this (trophy). Being here today with teams who have won the national championship, it’s inspiring.”

Former five-star quarterback prospect Dylan Raiola, an early recruiting coup for Rhule, left Nebraska this offseason after two years with the program.

MICHIGAN

No team in college football has been unwillingly thrust into the spotlight more this offseason than Michigan.

Head coach Sherrone Moore was fired in December for an inappropriate relationship with a staff member and subsequently was arrested for allegedly trespassing at the employee’s house and threatening her.

Before that was the Connor Stallions sign-stealing scandal that loomed over Michigan’s 2023 national championship campaign.

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