

Brian Hartline Looking For Run Game To Improve



Ohio State's 37-17 win over Maryland may have been headlined by a stellar defensive performance that limited a high-powered Terrapins offense to their lowest scoring total this season, but it also brought light to a struggling run game that failed to produce without their top performer. With junior running back TreVeyon Henderson sidelined with an undisclosed injury, the Buckeyes struggled to muster up any kind of consistent play from their tailbacks, totaling just 62 rushing yards on 33 carries, or a lowly 1.9 yards per carry, their lowest average since Oct. 1, 2011.

With the Buckeyes approaching the meat of their Big Ten schedule, which includes an upcoming battle with No. 6 Penn State on Oct. 21, the run game will likely need to vastly improve, something offensive coordinator Brian Hartline put bluntly when addressing the media for the first time since August Wednesday at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

"Not good enough," Hartline said when asked to describe the team's run game so far this season.

Hartline added that the Buckeyes' run game fell flat against Maryland when the offense needed them the most, something that he sees is telling when evaluating the effectiveness of a specific unit. While the Buckeyes did get a touchdown from Chip Trayanum in the third quarter, they often struggled to gain any traction against a Terrapins front, putting extra stress on quarterback Kyle McCord to move the ball down the field.

"I think that anytime you throw the ball or run the ball, you are evaluated when you need it most," Hartline said. "And I think that's important. I think that it's kind of like, when they know you're gonna run it, you know how well you run it? And when they know you're gonna pass it, how well do you pass it? It's a good indication."

The Buckeyes' new-look offensive line has often been a scapegoat for the lack of efficiency in the game this season, especially on short-yardage situations, but Hartline said the responsibility instead falls on the entire offense. Hartline specifically mentioned the wide receiver's ability to block on the outside as something that can kick start more explosive runs, something he said they could improve on moving forward this season. This came true during Ohio State's 17-14 victory over Notre Dame on Sept. 23, where junior wideout Marvin Harrison Jr.'s perimeter blocking led Henderson to find the edge and break free for a 61-yard score, his longest of the season.

"It's all encompassing," Hartline said. "It's the guys on the perimeter blocking. When you're throwing, it's the guys in the interior blocking for the quarterback. We don't play basketball, we play a total team sport. And to be successful in either one, you need the whole group. But I think that we can do a better job (blocking) on the perimeter, we can always do a better job. And we need to do a better job of running the football."

Despite the struggles, Hartline said he still has full belief that his offense can produce on a consistent basis this season. This is a feeling of trust that has spread throughout the locker room, allowing both Hartline and his players to feel more comfortable as the season progresses.

"I'm surrounded by great coaches," Hartline said. "I go to them whenever I need to go. I go to coach (Ryan) Day whenever I need to. I bounce things off them. So just like our receiver room and our offense feels very confident because of the guys in that room, I feel very confident because of the guys that surround me in the staff room. So I think what I can learn from them, the growth I've had since (the beginning of the season) has been awesome."