

Brown Shaping Up To Be Goal Line Weapon For Buckeyes



Amidst the chaos of the Ryan Day-Lou Holtz feud and the Buckeyes' convincing wins over Notre Dame and Maryland, one aspect of this Ohio State team has been largely forgotten over the past several weeks, that being been the usage — or lack thereof — of sophomore quarterback Devin Brown.

The highly touted quarterback prospect was a hot topic of discussion among fans and media towards the beginning of the season after Day announced he would be entrenched in a tight competition with Kyle McCord for the starting quarterback position, with the coach even keeping the battle open through the first two weeks of the season. Those conversations fizzled out in the middle of September, however, as the younger Brown failed to impress in the little playing time he was getting, paving the way for the junior McCord to take the reins and earn the starting nod for the rest of the season.

As the Buckeyes looked to stave off another Purdue upset at Ross-Ade Stadium on Saturday, the hype surrounding Brown made its return, when the second-year gunslinger was frequently inserted into the game as a goal-line and short-yardage weapon, giving the Buckeyes another dimension in critical situations where the team has struggled mightily so far this season.

Brown replaced McCord at the goal line and on third-and-short attempts on three first-half drives, contributing a 2-yard score, 17 rushing yards and a third-and-1 conversion in that sequence, and also committing a turnover in the process after fumbling in the end zone during the second quarter. While many were surprised to see the now-second-string quarterback on the field against the Boilermakers, Brown was prepared to make a difference in his new role, saying after the game that it had been a package they had implemented for him and practiced throughout the week.

"We game-planned it all week," Brown said. "I knew going in that it was going to be a possibility, and they just kept hammering into me to protect the ball and get ready to go."

Day, who first substituted Brown into the game on the previously mentioned third-and-1 attempt with 3:44 left in the second quarter, said the former four-star prospect gives his offense a different dynamic in the ground game due to his unique physicality and speed. Brown often displayed these traits at the goal line, where he rumbled on quarterback keepers in the Buckeyes' second drive of the second quarter for a gain of 8 and a touchdown score of 2.

“Devin is very explosive with his feet,” Day said. “He’s strong, he’s big, he’s powerful, he’s athletic, and we feel like he gives us a little bit of something there. He also throws the ball really well. But that’s something that we’ve looked at, we’ve been working on a little bit, and we felt like this was the right time on the road to do that. I think it did give us something, but we can’t turn the ball over on the 1-yard line. In a close game that could have been the difference.”

While Day detailed the challenges his quarterback presents for opposing defenses with his legs, Brown said he can also make a difference in games using his arm. The Gilbert, Ariz., native was praised for his arm strength coming out of high school — where threw for 4,881 yards and 57 TDs his senior season at Draper (Utah) Corner Canyon — and that was evident again on Saturday after he connected with freshman wideout Brandon Inniss on a 58-yard touchdown in the fourth quarter.

“I think they have to honor me,” Brown said. “I mean, when I got into the game, they’re instantly like, ‘33 is in.’ As soon as I get in there, they’re thinking I’m running or something like that, but I can also hurt them with the pass game as well.”

With high-stakes tilts against No. 7 Penn State (Oct. 21) and No. 2 Michigan (Nov. 25) on the horizon for the third-ranked Buckeyes, Day said he will continue to mull the idea of inserting the athletic Brown into the game on special goal-line and short-yardage packages. For the coach, this can provide his team with a clear advantage in these situations, which could bode well for Ohio State’s lofty championship aspirations moving forward.

“We’ll keep looking at it, keep building his package,” Day said. “Because we do feel like it gives us a little bit of a different change-up.”