

BSB Season Prediction: Howard The Key To Unlock Special Season For Buckeyes



Ohio State under head coach Ryan Day has never had an issue with talent, and this year is no different with the Buckeyes fielding perhaps their most loaded team yet in the Day era.

The Buckeyes are filled with first-round caliber NFL draft picks along with a plethora of promising youngsters - I'm looking at you, Jeremiah Smith. But when it comes to winning tough games down the stretch and achieving their three biggest goals: Defeating Michigan, winning a Big Ten championship and claiming the national title, finetuning the little things and plugging some potential holes on the roster will be of utmost importance.

While it isn't necessarily a "little thing," it is no secret Ohio State will need more consistent quarterback play this season if they want to finish the year on top. Now Syracuse quarterback Kyle McCord was a sufficient starter for most of the season, but his shortcomings were somewhat exposed against Michigan when he threw two interceptions, the first being a poor throw early in the game that seemed to give the Wolverines the momentum they needed to come away with the close win.

Ohio State, in my opinion, got that upgrade this offseason in Will Howard, who - unlike with McCord last season - was already tabbed as the starter as BSB went to print with the Football Preview issue. Howard brings an added element to the offense with his ability to extend plays with his legs and run for explosive gains, something that has been missing from the Buckeyes' offense since Justin Fields was in town from 2019-20.

Howard's dual-threat ability will only free up more space for future NFL running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins - considered by many as the top tailback duo in college football - a luxury that I think will be on full display as the Buckeyes cruise to early wins over Akron, Western Michigan and Marshall in the nonconference along with Michigan State and Iowa to start the Big Ten slate.

Ohio State and Howard will then be put to the test on the road against mighty Oregon on Oct. 12 in what should be their most difficult matchup of the non-CFP season, as well as one of the more highly anticipated matchups in all of college football. I see the Buckeyes competing hard and Howard making plays at what should be a raucous Autzen Stadium, but ultimately falling in a close, well-played contest to spoil their undefeated season.

I'll give it a score of Oregon: 28, Ohio State: 21.

The Buckeyes will use that loss as motivation as the fall rolls on, taking care of Nebraska on Oct. 26, Penn State on the road - a place where Ohio State has had success in since 2017 - on Nov. 2, Purdue on Nov. 9, Northwestern on Nov. 16 and Indiana on Nov. 23, all while the team and Howard continue to improve. That leads to none other than "The Game" on Nov. 30 at Ohio Stadium, a matchup that Ohio State and Day desperately need to win to keep seats cool and everyone sane in Buckeyeland.

Luckily for Ohio State fans, I see a 2018-type performance coming for the Buckeyes in this season's rivalry game, where the team uses all their pent-up rage along with an emotionally charged crowd to take care of the Wolverines in a convincing double-digit win.

I'll say Ohio State comes away with a 35-13 win over the Wolverines to put their archrivals out of playoff contention, with Howard throwing for two touchdowns and the defense playing one of their most dominant games of the season.

The much-needed victory over Michigan then sets up another revenge game against Oregon in the Big Ten Championship Game in Indianapolis, a place where Ohio State has not competed in since 2020. With that along with the previous loss to Oregon in the back of their minds, I see the Buckeyes playing a complete, crisp game on both sides of the ball to come out with the win, make it 21-17, propelling them to a Big Ten title and likely a top two seed and bye in the expanded 12-team College Football Playoff.

This sequence of events would put the Buckeyes in great position to achieve all three of their goals and secure that elusive national title, giving the program perhaps one of their more magical and successful seasons in history.

But like I mentioned earlier, that reality may only be reached if the Buckeyes can get elite and turnover-free quarterback play from the veteran Howard.

No pressure.

Big Ten Title: Ohio State over Oregon

Offensive POY: Dillon Gabriel, Oregon

Defensive POY: Will Johnson, Michigan

Coach of the Year: Dan Lanning, Oregon

Freshman of the Year: Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State

Big Ten CFP Teams: Ohio State and Oregon

Other Superlatives: **Best Ohio State freshman not named Jeremiah Smith**, safety Jaylen McClain....**Buckeye who takes home the most postseason awards**, cornerback Denzel Burke.....**Surprise performer of 2024**, linebacker Arvell Reese....**Heisman Trophy winner**, Georgia quarterback Carson Beck.....**National Championship Game prediction**, Georgia 35, Ohio State 28.