

BSB Split On Who Will Prevail In Happy Valley



After struggling for three-and-a-half quarters against Nebraska last week, No. 4 Ohio State faces one of its stiffer challenges of the season on Saturday afternoon when it travels to State College, Pa., to take on No. 3 Penn State in front of what should be a raucous Beaver Stadium Crowd. The top-five matchup offers plenty of intrigue, with the Nittany Lions and head coach James Franklin looking to prevail over the Buckeyes for the first time since the 2016 season, and Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day hoping to stave off the critics and defeat a highly-ranked opponent on the road.

As kickoff between the Buckeyes and Nittany Lions — set for noon on FOX — inches closer, here are our staff predictions for the matchup. Head to buckeyesports.com every Friday during the season for the latest staff predictions.

Patrick Engels:

Penn State Finally Breaks Through

Saturday's top four matchup between No. 4 Ohio State and No. 2 Penn State seems to me like a game where something has to give.

On one hand, Penn State and James Franklin are desperately due for a victory over Ohio State, having fallen on the short end of the stick against the Buckeyes for the past seven games. On the other hand, Ohio State and Ryan Day are desperately due for a signature top-five win, one which the Buckeyes' head coach has struggled to attain since taking the job in 2019, boasting a 2-6 record against AP top five foes during that time.

With winning streaks and reputations on the line Saturday afternoon at what should be a boisterous Beaver Stadium, I think it will be Penn State that finally comes out on top against the Buckeyes.

As discussed throughout the week, Ohio State's main weakness Saturday night is on the left side of their offensive line, which has completely fallen apart after injuries to starting left tackle Josh Simmons and backup-turned-starter Zen Michalski. With Michalski likely set to miss significant time, the Buckeyes are likely shifting left guard Donovan Jackson over to tackle and inserting sophomore Luke Montgomery to guard, a move that, while should provide some stability off the edge, could leave the Buckeyes vulnerable in the middle.

With Montgomery — or whoever comes in at left guard, for that matter — coming into the matchup with

little experience in a big game, there's a very good chance that he come out of the gates a little slow, similarly to what Michalski did against Nebraska, which could create some trouble for both Ohio State's rushing offense and the passing game.

To make matters worse, Penn State enters the game with the No. 1 rushing defense in the nation at just 75.5 yards allowed per game, and seven players who have recorded at least a ½ sack, including star junior defensive end Abdul Carter with four. I'd look for Carter to move around a lot on the defensive line and expose some of the holes on Ohio State's front five.

As was the case in the Oregon game, I think Ohio State's passing offense will be fine. Penn State's secondary is strong, but the Buckeyes just have too many weapons on the outside for them to handle. I expect Ohio State and Pennsylvania native Will Howard to spread it around well for a few scores. Howard has set up sort of a revenge game for himself against his hometown Nittany Lions, and I think he will perform well, but if the trend of him throwing an interception in nearly every game continues, that could bite them in the end.

I think this game will come down to Ohio State's defense against Penn State's offense. Last season, the Buckeyes were dominant against Drew Allar and the Nittany Lions, but this appears to be a different season for both teams, with the Buckeyes being a little underwhelming on that side of the ball so far this season, especially giving up explosive plays, and the Nittany Lions being better on offense than many expected.

If Allar can stay upright and not turn the ball over, I think Penn State should be able to move the ball fairly well against the Buckeyes, who I think will be playing a little tight knowing in the back of their heads how much this game means for them and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles. I don't think we'll see Allar channel his inner Dillon Gabriel on Saturday, but I could see him doing enough to put his team in a position to win in the end, and letting his star running backs Nick Singleton and Kaytron Allen set the tone. I'd also look out for star tight end Tyler Warren in this one, who could prove to be a nightmare matchup for Ohio State's linebackers and safeties.

With all that mentioned, both of these teams are pretty even, but there's something to be said about the intangibles of this game. I think Penn State will come into this matchup playing freely and aggressively by feeding off an electric crowd, while the Buckeyes will be feeling the pressure of what could be a collapsing "natty or bust season."

Forgive me if I'm wrong, but I've picked Ohio State to be on the winning side of the last the last three games against top 10 opponents (against Michigan and Missouri in 2023 and Oregon this October, all losses), and I'm not doing it again. I have Penn State pulling off a signature win and ending the Buckeyes chances of a Big Ten Championship with four weeks left in the regular season. **Penn State 30 Ohio State, 24**

Bobby Gorbett:

OSU Pulls Off Statement Win

Penn State week is finally here, and for the first time in years, this game feels like do-or-die time for Ohio State. Already having sustained a loss to Oregon a few weeks ago, the Buckeyes have to defeat Penn State in Happy Valley to have a chance at the Big Ten Championship and even control their own destiny in the College Football Playoff.

Regardless of who Penn State has at quarterback, the Nittany Lions will without doubt play with as much energy and intensity as they have all year as they try to finally get over the hump against Ohio State and solidify themselves as national championship contenders.

It's safe to say Ohio State will need its best game to pull off the rare top-five victory; I'm confident they'll rise to the occasion.

With everything that has gone wrong for the Buckeyes since losing to Oregon on the road, if they are the team everyone thought they were before the season, they will leave everything on the field against Penn State and come through with a huge win.

With elite defenders like Abdul Carter on their side, it is no easy task to score points on the Penn State defense, but still, through seven games, it feels like when the Buckeyes just stay out of their own way, the passing offense is unstoppable.

Defensively, the Buckeyes failed miserably in their matchup against the Ducks, but I think the matchup against Penn State is a much more favorable one. With two rushers like Kaytron Allen and Nick Singleton, the Penn State rushing attack is fearsome, but the Buckeyes have been pretty reliable against even the best rushing attacks to this point. I think that continues on Saturday. **Ohio State 28, Penn State 17**

Greg Wilson:

Ohio State Survives On Road

The matchup against Penn State has been one that is always nerve-racking but in the past seven seasons, has ended with the Buckeyes headed home a winner. In each of those matchups, Ohio State was the higher-ranked and the favored team. This will be the first time that James Franklin will face off against the Buckeyes as the better team, according to the AP top 25.

As shown by the Buckeyes' recent stretch of losses to Michigan, no win streak against a good team can last forever and this game is anything but a foregone conclusion.

The main thing that will have the biggest effect on the outcome of this game is who is at the left tackle position. Letting Zen Michalski remain in a close game against Nebraska a week ago either means Ryan Day believed he would be able to work through his struggles and had some major trust in him, or he has very little trust in the players who would be in at the spot behind Michalski. I believe it's much more the latter.

If Donovan Jackson slides over, with Austin Sierveld taking the left guard spot, that seems like the Buckeyes' best chance at remaining competitive when it comes to getting the run game going and allowing Will Howard more time to work with, but it's going to be a tough task for the line to match up in the trenches against the Nittany Lions great defensive ends.

With Drew Allar expected to play, I think the Buckeye defense has the ability to shut him down again, maybe not to the extreme extent that it did in 2023, but enough to give the offense a chance. As I did last week, I'm also going to predict another Jeremiah Smith touchdown, because why not? He's done it in every other game so far. **Ohio State 21, Penn State 20**