

Buckeyes Confident In Red Zone Defense That Has Been One Of The Best In The Nation



The Ohio State defense has been able to carry the offense to multiple wins this season, proving to be one of the best in the nation. Against Rutgers, they did so again, and even with the Scarlet Knights taking six different trips into the red zone.

Defending in the red zone and preventing touchdowns have been just one of many different strengths defensive coordinator Jim Knowles' defense has had this season, but it might be one of the most important.

The team is tied for 11th in the country in red zone defense, allowing points on only 72.7 percent of the drives opponents have taken deep into Ohio State territory. Defensive end Jack Sawyer doesn't think it's an accident this team has been so good in those high-pressure situations.

"This goes back to our whole motto with the Silver Bullets is, give us an inch and we'll defend it," Sawyer said. "For some reason, whatever reason it is, when we get down there everyone just rises up a little more, and we get those huge stops. Coach (Ryan) Day calls them four-point plays when we force field goals and don't let them in endzone. A lot of times, they've been missing field goals, too."

The Buckeyes have had six "four-point plays" this season, and three of them came against the Knights on the 4-, 3- and 2-yard line on three straight drives. Not only have they held teams to making a field goal six times, but they have also forced field goals that have been missed, like Sawyer said.

Knowles said they have been so good in the red zone because of how much they have practiced those scenarios, allowing the players to gain the confidence that they can keep teams out of the end zone.

"Confidence only comes one way, unless it's false confidence," Knowles said. "Real confidence just comes from practice and doing it over and over again. You only have certain concepts you use in those circumstances... It's more of just our guys knowing the system. They know what we're going to call, and

they know what they're supposed to do. There are a million things that could happen but they've covered it, they've practiced it."

Only two teams in the Big Ten have been better in the red zone. Iowa has allowed scored at a 68.2 percent rate, and Michigan has allowed scores at an NCAA best 45.5 percent rate, 20 percent better Duke, the team in second place.