

Buckeyes Defense Trying To Stay Dominant In Cotton Bowl



The past two years, the Buckeyes modus operandi has been letting the defense lead the way, and 14 games into this season, they have the No. 1 scoring defense in the country, allowing just 12.1 points per game.

Against Tennessee in the first round and Oregon in the Rose Bowl, the entire Ohio State team was firing on all cylinders, getting out to a 34-0 lead on the Ducks before they were able to find the end zone right before heading into the locker room for halftime.

The game plan they have had for their two biggest games of the season to this point on the defensive side of the ball has been working well, especially early on in games, and now Jim Knowles is going to need to figure out how to carry that into the Cotton Bowl against Texas on Friday.

“I think Coach (Ryan) Day has been doing a good job making sure there’s no let-off. Last week doesn’t matter if you lose this one. So we’re not really focused on anything that’s happened in the past. It’s a clean slate,” linebacker Sonny Styles said. “We’re focused on beating Texas. They’ve got a really good team, a really talented team, and we’ve got to bring our best to be able to win that game.”

At times, the Texas offense has become a bit one-dimensional, focusing on getting the passing game before the running game. This season, the Longhorns are 63rd in the country in rushing offense with 165.5 yards per game on the ground, but 15th in passing offense, 278.5 yards per game in the air.

Against Arizona State, they had just 53 rushing yards, with Quinn Ewers throwing for 322, leading to 39 points in two overtimes.

“You could say they struggled the past few games with the run game, but I think they’ve got a super explosive run game,” Styles said. “I think they’re capable of putting up around 50 points if you let them. The defense has to show up ready to play. It’s an extremely talented offense on all three levels.”

Sophomore safety Caleb Downs has played against Texas before when he was at Alabama last season, and he believes the Longhorns can be tough to figure out when they’re playing at their best because of the pre-snap motion offensive coordinator Kyle Flood includes in his game plan.

“The OC does a really great job of providing a lot of eye candy for the defense,” Downs said. “All of the

shifts and motions, you have to make sure you're on the same page in order to play a really sound and complete game."

The unit had possibly its best game against Oregon on Jan. 1, with eight sacks, nine passes broken up and 13 tackles for a loss, following a four-sack game against the Volunteers. If they can keep Texas needing to pass the ball to stay in the game, senior defensive tackle Tyleik Williams is confident they can do the same thing to the Longhorns.

"(Knowles) teaches a lot of technique," Williams said. "Sometimes it doesn't show up because teams scheme you different ways, but when you have a team one-dimensional, they have to pass the ball. That's when all the pass/rush technique comes out."