

Buckeyes Feel Battle-Tested Ahead Of Rivalry Game



Traveling north to Ann Arbor and defeating No. 3 Michigan at their home stadium is certainly no easy task for Ohio State. In fact, the program enters this year's matchup having not won a game at Michigan Stadium since 2019, when the then-Justin Fields and J.K. Dobbins-led Buckeyes cruised to a 56-27 blowout victory.

Despite the majority of Ohio State's 2023 roster having still yet to taste the thrill of a road victory in The Game, head coach Ryan Day said on Tuesday that his team is more than ready to go into Michigan and leave with a program-defining win. He cited his team's road successes this season, most notably their wins against Notre Dame on Sept. 23 and Wisconsin on Oct. 28, as reasons why he holds this belief, which have allowed them to come into Saturday's matchup as battle-tested as ever.

"We have the schedule right over there," Day said while pointing to a display of the team's schedule in the Ohio State team room. "I point to those white blocks right there, the teams we knew we had to play on the road this season, (which was) more (road games) than we had in the past. It's been great to get battle-tested. So our team does have a reference point. It'll be loud, it'll be hostile, great environment. But we've been in those before. And so (having) a reference point going into the game is important."

Day's confidence in his group to be "road warriors" stems from their two biggest road victories against Notre Dame and Wisconsin, both of which were close contests heading into the fourth quarter, with the Buckeyes prevailing in each game in front of a raucous crowd. These two wins — especially the Notre Dame victory, where the team rallied in the final two minutes to defeat the Fighting Irish on a last-second score — have allowed the entire team feel more comfortable than ever heading into the team's most significant game of the season.

"When you play hard games, you learn how to win in tough environments," wide receiver Emeka Egbuka said. "Especially Notre Dame since it was an away game. So you learn what it takes to win in those types of environments and what you have to do as a team. And even when it's a close game like

that — it probably is going to be close this weekend, that's the way it always ends up — it just teaches you how to win in those scenarios.”

“I think that was a great test for us early on,” quarterback Kyle McCord added. “Going into a hostile environment, playing a really good team, really good defense on the road. So I think that's definitely helped us. I think we know that we've been through a tough environment. And we won that game. I think guys stepped up, made some big time plays. And I think that was kind of a turning point early on in the year where we realized, 'Okay, we're legit team. We're exactly who we thought we were going to be.' So I think the biggest thing now is using that experience to help us get ready for Saturday, because obviously, it's going to be a similar type of environment.”

With two hard-fought road victories on the resume this year, along with the added motivating factor of back-to-back losses to the Wolverines in 2021 and 2022 weighing in the back of their minds, those within the Woody Hayes Athletic Center are confident that they can get the job done on Saturday and emerge from Ann Arbor with a statement victory.

“When you (play at) Ohio State, livelihoods are at stake,” cornerback Denzel Burke said. “You have to win this game. It's mandatory. We had to live with it for 365 days, so we're ready.”