

# Cotton Bowl Offers “Great Opportunity” For Ohio State’s Depth To Step Up



Once it was announced that Ohio State would match up with Missouri in the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 29 – just the second time in the last five seasons that the Buckeyes will not participate in the College Football Playoff – it was clear that it would be a chance for Ohio State to flex its depth, with several players expected to opt out in advance of entering their name into the NFL Draft.

But that depth became even more important after Ohio State saw 12 players – including quarterback Kyle McCord and wide receiver Julian Fleming, among others – enter the transfer portal once it opened on Monday. While head coach Ryan Day indicated that the Buckeyes would be at full strength when asked about potential opt outs, it’s still expected that the likes of Marvin Harrison Jr. and other expected draft entries have played their final games at Ohio State.

And it opens up a significant opportunity for Ohio State’s younger players, who will get a chance to go up against a top-10 team on a big stage in the Cotton Bowl.

“Any time you get to a point like this in the season you’re playing against an opponent that has the type of record and resume that Missouri has, you’re going to get challenged,” Day said on Sunday. “Great opportunity for our defense to go against a very good opponent. There may be opportunities for guys to step in, not unique to the season.”

“Bowl practice is a great opportunity,” Day added. “It’s three phases for us. We have our fundamental phase. We have our game-plan phase. Then we actually have our practices down at the site. We’ll work on those three phases and look to develop our fundamentals with the young guys and really enhance and allow our older guys to make sure they stay sharp.”

Depth at quarterback, wide receiver and in the secondary are certainly expected to be tested after losses in the portal and due to expected opt outs, but opportunities will exist across the field for younger players to step up. A chance to work for nearly an entire month leading into the Cotton Bowl – not to mention the chance to play in the game – will boost the Buckeyes not just in their bowl destination, but once work begins for next season.

“It will be a really good week – or a good month of preparation and practice – for some of our younger guys to get out there but also possibly get in the game,” Day said. “We’ve seen that in the past.

Certainly in the Rose Bowl where some of the younger guys were able to get into the game and that propelled them into the offseason and into the winter program.”