

Day Expecting More Out Of Ohio State Offense



Ohio State is entering Week 2 with a 1-0 record, but that reality did not stop head coach Ryan Day from critiquing his team's performance after Saturday's game. Led by a stagnant offense and a few busted defensive plays, the Buckeyes struggled to gain much separation from a less talented and new-look Indiana squad in the first half, hanging onto just a 10-3 lead at the break.

Ohio State would put forth a more crisp performance in the second half to cruise to a 20-point victory, outgaining the Hoosiers 208-65. But the late efforts were not enough to keep the Buckeyes' leader satisfied — especially on the offensive end.

"Mixed bag, I guess, right now, Day said following the 23-3 win. "I thought there were some good things. But we have to play better situational football. We have to finish in the red zone. We have to finish in short yardage. And we have to do a better job on third down. If we can do that then (we) certainly, you know, will be better."

Day, who is now 5-0 in season-openers as head coach at Ohio State, admitted that he expected his team to start out the season with some "clunky" play on the road against their Big Ten opponent, as they entered Bloomington, Ind. with a rather inexperienced roster, primarily at quarterback and offensive line. He compared Saturday's disjointed play to the Buckeyes' 2021 season opener against Minnesota — C.J. Stroud's first collegiate start — where they entered halftime trailing the inferior Gophers 14-10, only to come away with the 45-31 victory. Despite the anticipation of poor play, Day still was not pleased with his team's performance, pointing to the offensive struggles as a main point of concern.

"Yes (I anticipated the 'clunky' play). Day said. "But I want better. I did anticipate some of this. Saw it going a little the way it did. But I thought we'd get more points. I thought we would convert some of those. And we're used to doing that here."

Day specifically pointed to the offense's inability to convert on third-down, especially on short yardage attempts, as his largest gripe stemming from Saturday's contest. Last season, Stroud and Ohio State converted 45.2 percent of their third-down attempts (75 of 166), ranking 26th in the NCAA. That was not the case for Kyle McCord and his Buckeyes' offense this weekend, however, as they were just 2-12 in that category, good for 16.7 percent. They also were 0-3 on third-down attempts of 3rd-and-3 and less, with those plays resulting in a net loss of -3 yards.

“Well, I know when you get off schedule, and it’s 3rd-and-9, 3rd-and-10, the percentages there go way down,” Day said. “But we expect on 3rd-and-3, 3rd-and-2, 3rd-and-1 to convert about 80% of the time. When we’re not, that puts us completely out of whack. And that happened today. And that can’t happen moving forward.”

Day also referred to the carelessness displayed by his offense at times as another point of concern heading into Week 2. The Buckeyes recorded just one turnover against Indiana, but it was a potentially-costly one — that being McCord’s 4th-and-2 interception in the second quarter. This briefly turned the momentum in the Hoosiers favor, leading them on a eight-yard drive that resulted in a Chris Freeman field goal.

“What you can’t do is take a bunch of chances and be reckless and all of a sudden put yourself at risk of losing a game,” Day said. “You can’t do that. (We) probably could have been a little bit more aggressive at times today, but the number one goal is to get the win and then move forward. There’s going to have to be times (where) we’re going to have to be more aggressive, for sure.”

Although he voiced his displeasure towards his team’s sluggish offense, Day sees this slow start as a learning experience for his young team as they embark on a difficult 12-game slate of games. For he and his program, the season-opening victory is just one small step towards their lofty goals for 2023.

“There’s just unknowns when you have guys who are starting for the first time, and then you can kind of identify it and grow from there,” Day said. “So the goal is to win the first game. You don’t need to be playing your best football in the first game of the year. But you have to grow from it. You have to make sure that win is under your belt, because in a few weeks, nobody cares. The win is a win, and then you move on. But the goal is to get it, and then we have to grow.”