

Day, Knowles Impressed By Western Kentucky Offense



Ohio State may face its toughest non-conference test on Sept. 23 when they travel to Notre Dame Stadium to take on the ninth-ranked Fighting Irish, but that has not stopped head coach Ryan Day and his staff from overlooking their Week 3 opponent.

Speaking in front of the media at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center Tuesday, both Day and defensive coordinator Jim Knowles extended praise to Western Kentucky (2-0) and the high-flying offense they will bring to Ohio Stadium on Sept. 16.

“They’re gonna play fast and try to spread us out,” Day said. “I think they do an excellent job. I mean, it’s gonna be a big challenge for our defensive line. It’s gonna be a challenge for our defense. And they do a great job on defense and try to change up the looks. So this is a good challenge for us.”

Knowles, who’s defense has relinquished just 10 total points and 387 yards through its first two games against Indiana and Youngstown State, said the Hilltoppers will present a much more unique test this Saturday due to their ability to stretch the field with their passing attack. This, along with their fast pace of play, is an element that the Buckeyes’ defense has not faced so far this season, according to the defensive play caller.

“They’re very similar to a Big 12 type of offense,” Knowles said. “They’ll throw the ball down the field, get you running on the perimeter, trying to tire out your defensive lineman, get you moving sideways in order to then go up top and create eye violations.”

Knowles, who has faced multiple prolific offenses while calling defensive plays at Oklahoma State from 2018-2021, was particularly impressed with Western Kentucky gunslinger Austin Reed, who led all of college football in passing yards last season with 4,746. The 2022 Davey O’Brien Award finalist, has continued that success into 2023, logging 589 passing yards and eight total scores through his first two games of the season against South Florida and Houston Christian.

“He operates with impunity,” Knowles said. “He just has a catch the ball and sling it around mentality. He doesn’t get hit a lot. That’s where you really take notice. It’s just like an operator, a cool operator, he just never seems under pressure, doesn’t make a lot of bad throws. He just slings it with a purpose, he knows where he’s going and doesn’t get caught off guard too much.”

For Knowles, he believes his unit will only be able to slow down Reed and the Hilltoppers’ well-oiled offensive attack if they play with poise and discipline throughout the game, which will limit their potential explosiveness. According to the second-year coordinator, his entire group must be on the same page and enter the field with a heightened focus if they are able to achieve this.

“You have to be able to keep the ball in front of you,” Knowles said. “You have to be able to, what I call, ‘smart swarm,’ you have to be able to chase with proper leverage. You can’t just chase randomly on the screens. Everybody’s got to be at the right place”