

# Engels' Angle: Buckeyes' Resilience In CFP A Testament To Character In Locker Room



Just over six weeks ago, Ohio State seemed to have cratered to rock bottom in the Ryan Day era.

Following an unimaginable 13-10 loss to 6-5 Michigan on Nov. 30, Day seemed lifeless and in a state of shock during the program's "Carmen Ohio" postgame tradition, a look that continued while his team was engaging in an all-out brawl with the Wolverines at midfield over a U-M flag being planted on the Block "O."

Day's players were in a similar state. Some of them left in tears, while others - like Jack Sawyer and Will Howard - had a more angry demeanor, Sawyer having to be restrained by his teammates during the brawl and Howard clapping back at reporters in the postgame.

This series of events ushered in what may have been the ugliest few weeks in recent Buckeye history. Fans and reporters alike were aggressively calling for Day's job, with some saying he is not built to lead a big-time college program like Ohio State to the promised land.

The character of the players was also questioned by many, who claimed that they were far too "soft" to play the championship brand of football that many Buckeye fans had become accustomed to over the years.

With criticisms of the program at an all-time high, it seemed that there was just no possible avenue for Day and his team to recover and move forward in the College Football Playoff.

I certainly didn't think they could do it. I picked the Buckeyes to lose against Tennessee in the first round simply because I thought the pressure was too much, and I honestly also thought Day was going to bolt to another opportunity after the season ended because of that said pressure.

But, boy, was I wrong about all of that.

Instead of losing in the first round and having all sorts of chaos ensue in Columbus, Day and the Buckeyes picked themselves off the ground and steamrolled their way to the national championship game with three straight convincing victories. It's an almost miraculous turnaround that not many people saw coming, especially when considering the path they had to go through to get there, that

being defeating talented Tennessee at home, No. 1-ranked, undefeated Oregon at the Rose Bowl and now star-laden Texas at the Cotton Bowl.

Ohio State's turnaround is in large part due to its success on the field. The Buckeyes seem to be clicking on all cylinders, using explosive offense to get out to big leads while also benefiting from some suffocating defense in each of their three wins.

But to me, this turnaround is more of a product of the team's ability to bounce back from a mental aspect.

With many of their players having likely long NFL careers ahead of them, the Buckeyes could have easily rolled over and given up on the season. Day could have done the same and left town for another school or NFL franchise.

But they didn't do any of that. Instead, they looked themselves in the mirror, had difficult conversations about the Michigan loss and came out of their darkest days a completely different team with a refreshed and pissed-off mentality.

"We've been through difficult times together. How do you know about someone's character? When you go through tough times with them," Day said after the 28-14 Cotton Bowl win. "Everything is easy when things are going well. Everyone can be a front-runner. So I think we talk about those things because our story has been - the last couple years has been ups and downs.

"But to see the team play the way that they did in the fourth quarter today, I think that's why that's relevant. That's why we're talking about it. Because I don't think without going through those things, we would have come through the way we did in the fourth quarter. And now we have the opportunity to play for a national championship, and I couldn't be prouder of our guys. I couldn't be."

The Buckeyes certainly have a lot more work to do in order to completely avenge the brutal Michigan loss and finish the season as the top dog in college football. But the fact that they were able to rise from the ashes and find themselves one win away from a title is, like Day said, a true testament to the type of people they have in that locker room.

But I think the turnaround also serves as a pretty powerful life lesson for all who paid attention. In a current society, especially in sports, that sees many people bolt when the going gets tough, the Buckeyes stuck together and did their best to come out of adversity stronger than when they entered it.

I don't think a lot of other programs could have stayed together or gotten themselves out of this funk quite like the way Ohio State did. So, no matter if the Buckeyes win the national title or not, I tip my cap to Day and his program for staying the course.