

Fall Camp Offensive Observations: Will Howard Has Stranglehold On Competition, Virus-Infected Offensive Line Shuffles Again



Ohio State completed its seventh fall camp practice on a scorching hot Woody Hayes Athletic Center field Thursday morning, an approximately three-hour intense session that gave those in attendance perhaps the best glimpse yet of how the team is shaping out this summer.

Despite both Ryan Day and Chip Kelly saying that they have not made a decision at quarterback yet, Thursday's practice provided yet another example of the starting job increasingly becoming Will Howard's to lose, as the fifth-year transfer once again took the majority of first-team reps — a recurring theme throughout the first seven fall camp practices — with Devin Brown and Julian Sayin appearing to split second-team snaps and Lincoln Kienholz and Air Noland following behind.

Howard started the team portion of practice rather slowly, throwing a number of passes too high for his intended receivers and even tossing an interception to Denzel Burke on an underthrown ball towards the sideline. The veteran showed his poise and bounced back soon after, though.

During a situational 11-on-11 period when the offense started with the ball outside of the red zone with one timeout and 1:25 on the clock, Howard completed back-to-back accurate passes to tight end Will Kacmarek and wide receiver Carnell Tate. Then — after three-consecutive incompletions — he rebounded again and found an open Jelani Thurman in the back-corner of the endzone for the score.

This sequence seemed to give Howard some momentum for the rest of practice, as he commanded the offense and looked comfortable in the pocket the rest of the way. He also showed off his legs a bit, taking a quarterback power call from Kelly while backed up in their end zone for a short gain, and then — with the field flipped and the offense in the red zone — keeping an option play for himself and running in for the touchdown.

While Howard showed why he is considered the frontrunner for the starting job at practice No. 7, Brown did his own to prove he is deserving of staying in the race with a solid performance. The third-year Buckeye showed off his dual-threat ability on 11-on-11 drills — a common theme for Ohio State's quarterbacks Thursday morning — taking an option for himself for a red-zone score late in the practice and also delivering a pair of beautiful deep balls, one to Thurman in the corner of the end zone, and the

another to Jayden Ballard down the sideline that put the offense into the red zone.

Brown had what BSB thought was his best outing of fall camp so far, a performance that may have contributed to Day saying after practice that both Brown and Howard have separated themselves and are earning the “lion’s share” of reps.

While both Howard and Brown had strong days, the overall practice went to the defense, who took advantage of an undermanned offensive line to flex their muscles in the trenches. BSB observed Ohio State’s talented rushmen get at least four “sacks” on the day by taking advantage of a virus-ridden offensive line that had many players laboring or simply not practicing.

Likely due to what Day called a “funky virus,” offensive linemen Carson Hinzman and George Fitzpatrick did not practice, while starting left guard Donovan Jackson was limited and Zen Michalski left practice early. Numerous Buckeye offensive linemen vomited during the practice, including center Seth McLaughlin — who vomited before practice even began — Deontae Armstrong and Michalski.

As a result of these illnesses, Ohio State ran out some different front-fives than normal. A few of note were usual left guard Austin Siereveld earning first-team reps at left tackle and Josh Padilla taking first-team reps at left guard. Those two often ran with McLaughlin, Josh Simmons and Josh Fryar from left to right, while Luke Montgomery also saw some time with the first-team at right guard.

Aside from the quarterbacks and offensive line, BSB observed strong practices from Thurman, who caught a pair of touchdowns and was heavily featured in red zone packages, freshman wide receiver Jeremiah Smith, who beat cornerback Davison Igbinosun for a significant gain down the sidelines just a few plays before Igbinosun swatted the ball away from Smith in the red zone — and let him hear about it after — and wideout David Aldolph, who caught a touchdown from Kienholz during a 7-on-7 drill after a smooth corner route in the end zone.

Ohio State will hold its eighth practice of fall camp Friday, but it will not be open to the media. The media will, however, have an availability after practice with wide receivers/ Brian Hartline and cornerbacks/Tim Walton. The next practice open to the media will be sometime next week, but BSB will provide ongoing coverage of fall camp on BuckeyeSports.com along with the BuckeyeSports.com Fan Forum.