

J.T. Tuimoloau's Speech Helped Ohio State Move Past Uncertainty



With Ohio State's fate unknown following the loss to Michigan, there was nothing the Buckeyes could do other than wait.

The results of conference championship weekend – one being played without Ohio State for the second consecutive season – would determine whether the Buckeyes would sneak into the College Football Playoff or be relegated to a non-playoff bowl to finish the season. Ohio State continued practicing during the layoff, working in preparation for whatever might have come next, and safety Tanner McCalister said it was a challenge to get motivated.

"It's tough coming back on the field knowing the last time you were on the field you lost the big game," he said.

What helped Ohio State get back on the field and prepare – whether it was for a random bowl game or the College Football Playoff – was a speech from one of the team's young contributors. Sophomore defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau, frustrated with what he saw during practice, let the team know how he was feeling.

"He stood in the middle of us before our one of our first practices and basically told us, 'Hey, there's still a possibility. Let's not feel sorry for ourselves. Let's try to get better today,'" McCalister said. "Those practices ended up being pretty good practice, to be honest, after J.T. stood up...You could kind of do kind of feel the downness this from all the players in the locker room before we put the pads on and came out here, but it ended up being two really good days of practice."

Sophomore defensive tackle Mike Hall Jr. corroborated McCalister's account, and said Tuimoloau – as well as quarterback C.J. Stroud – helped get the team into gear.

"Before practice he got up in the middle of everybody and he was yelling, basically saying what I'm saying, 'We've still got a chance. I know everybody's mad about the loss. I know we're all pissed off, but let's not come out here and waste this day. Let's come out here and execute, let's come out here and get

better, so when we do get that chance we can maximize it," Hall recounted.

Tuimoloau said he felt it was a chance to bring the team back together, and was spurred to the moment by the support he felt from his teammates.

"All the guys in this program are pretty much my motivation," he said. "It was something I felt like...we just needed to get back on track, and these boys push me to go my hardest and bring out the best me every day. I feel like it's being a young buck and being around themm I know what we are as a team and I know what we can bring, so I just want to come in and just reiterate that the job's not finished."