

Jim Knowles, Buckeye Defense Preparing For Up-Tempo Tennessee Offense



The Buckeyes are welcoming an SEC team into the Horseshoe for the first round of the College Football Playoff on Saturday having not seen much of an up-tempo offense this season since teams normally try to bleed the clock against the Buckeyes.

But with Tennessee coming to visit Ohio Stadium on Saturday, one of the biggest issues that offense gives most defenses is the fast tempo it works at, helping them get to the No. 8 scoring offense in the country (37.3 points per game) and the same spot for total offense at 462.9 yard per game. The Volunteers are also 11th in plays per game run with 74.6, with Nebraska the only team that was on the Buckeyes regular season schedule that comes anywhere close, 23 spots behind Tennessee.

Usually an up-tempo offense like that is one that passes the ball a lot, but that hasn't been what the Volunteers have relied on this season. Running back Dylan Sampson has run for 1,485 yards and 22 touchdowns on 256 attempts, which ranks ninth, tied for fourth and ninth, respectively, winning him SEC Offensive Player of the Year.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and multiple Buckeye defenders said on Tuesday that they feel ready for the challenge that will give Ohio State, which is one they haven't seen this year.

"They do it as well as anybody because when you're doing it right, every play has a run and has a pass and it's 50/50, and you're gaining as many yards in the air as you do on the ground," Knowles said. "Coach Day can have our (second string) offense run a series of tempo plays and we have trained our scout team to run tempo plays.

"It doesn't make (preparation) harder, it makes it different," Knowles added later. "But I think we're ahead of the game that way. Our defense is built that way. It's built for tempo. ... We're the fastest play-calling defense in the country."

They have also been using other methods in practice to make sure the defense can be prepared for a situation when they have to move quickly.

"We'll a lot of times have the defense turn their backs to the offense, or 'Hey, you 11 guys line up over here, then the offense comes running here and you have to sprint over to your position and line up and play," Knowles said. "You're trying to be creative to create any way you can so they understand the speed and the decision making that's going to have to take place."

The player leading that offense is quarterback Nico Iamaleava, who has thrown for 2,512 yards on 199-of-303 passing this season for 19 touchdowns and five interceptions. He has also accumulated 311 rushing yards and another touchdown on the ground as well. Knowles has a lot of respect for the talent Iamaleava brings to the gridiron.

"He's got a really strong arm," Knowles said. "The type of offense they play, he has to be able to make throws from hash to sideline, and he's got a cannon. And I think he's faster than everybody thinks. He's fast, and he makes a lot of plays with his feet also."