

Knowles Keeping Defense In The Present For Michigan Game, Not Looking Back At Losses



When it comes to the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry, there is more history than anyone is able to remember. But right now, the recent history of the rivalry has been sudden dominance on the Wolverines end for two years, winning by a combined 37 points in 2021 and 2022. Now with the sign-stealing investigation into Michigan, the legitimacy of those two seasons has come into question.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said the current team isn't thinking about that at all because it's not going to help them complete the task at hand which is beating Michigan this upcoming Saturday.

"Whatever happened, happened," Knowles said Tuesday. "That's not going to help us. Those things that happened in the past, I need to figure all that out and process that and determine what's important to then pass on to the team, because they don't need to be worried about any of that."

While they aren't looking back this week, what happened in the past against Michigan has been a huge part of the identity of this year's Ohio State team. In the 2022 game against the Wolverines, Knowles' first season in Columbus, the team gave up multiple explosive plays late in the game that led to the Buckeyes being outscored 28-3 in the second half of the game.

That led Knowles and the rest of the coaching staff to completely change their defensive approach going into 2023. Their philosophy entirely centered around preventing explosive plays, which they have been extremely successful at doing. The defense has only allowed one play that has gone for 40 or more yards, and that was the trick play against Rutgers on a fourth and short. Despite the success, Knowles is always working to make sure they can continue that type of play.

"We never feel like we have it down, ever" Knowles said. "It's a constant pursuit to defend explosive plays. Look at the one that got us, that fake sneak thing. Hats off to them, what a great play. But you never know where they're going to come from, so you better be on high alert. It has shown to be a real factor in this game when you study statistics."

Regardless of how it has changed the team's approach, Knowles still doesn't want the players focusing on anything other than themselves when they head up to Ann Arbor on Saturday.

"They have to play hard, they have to play tough, they have to play fast. They don't really need to be worried about that. I can think about that. ruminates on that, and go through all the things in the offseason. But ultimately, we're better right now because of it, so we have to stick with that."