

Legacy Talk Surrounds Stroud Ahead Of College Football Playoff



Following Ohio State's loss to Michigan on Nov. 26, Buckeyes quarterback C.J. Stroud reflected on his legacy at OSU. The Inland Empire, Calif., native had produced gaudy statistics during his two years at the helm of the Ohio State offense, but a pair of significant blemishes remained on his resume.

Since taking over as the starting quarterback in 2021, Stroud boasts a 21-3 record for the Buckeyes but he's 0-2 against the rival Wolverines and has never won the Big Ten East Division or competed in the Big Ten Championship game.

"People are going to say I never won The Game, and I understand," Stroud said after the loss to Michigan. "People are going to say I never won a Big Ten championship, and I understand. When it comes to that, I just have to eat it. It's life, nothing has ever been easy for me and I don't expect it to be easy."

While Stroud's 7,775 career passing yards and 81 touchdowns both rank second all-time in Ohio State's history, that pair of missteps have dampened the outlook on Stroud's illustrious career.

After the Michigan loss, it also appeared that Stroud would never get his shot in the College Football Playoff. As both of his losses to the Wolverines knocked the Buckeyes out of playoff position, Ohio State was forced to settle for a Rose Bowl appearance in 2021 and appeared to be prime to play in another New Year's Six bowl in 2022, slotting in at No. 5 in the penultimate CFP rankings. However, the Buckeyes received some much-needed help from Utah — who defeated then-No. 4 USC in the Pac-12 Championship, pushing Stroud and Co. into playoff position.

For Stroud, Ohio State's appearance in the CFP provides him and the Buckeyes with an opportunity to prove their worth, as well as bounce back from the difficult loss to the Wolverines.

"I never really want to hang my head down because there are so many other things to be proud of and

so many great things we did this season," Stroud said. "Of course, you don't want to lose. Being a competitor, of course, you're not going to be happy all the time. But at the same time, there's really no point in hanging your head down."

While the conversation regarding his legacy has continued since the loss to Michigan, Stroud said that he doesn't pay it any mind and just continues to work toward the Buckeyes' appearance in the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl on Dec. 31 against No. 1 Georgia.

"It's not up to me. I go out there on Saturdays and do what I have to do, execute my job," Stroud said. "Everybody is entitled to their own opinion. I'm C.J. Stroud and I hold my own opinion, hold my own critique. My family is really the only critique that I care about, other than myself and my coaches and teammates, and of course God.

"If that's what they think, that's on them. I know who I am as a person and who I am as a player, and I think my teammates know that as well, which is even more important to me."

Stroud will have an opportunity to bolster his Ohio State legacy with a CFP run that could potentially include another chance to avenge his previous two losses to Michigan in the national title game. But first, Stroud must lead the Buckeyes past one of the most feared defenses in the country in Georgia in the semifinal.

As the Peach Bowl grows closer by the day, Stroud said he and the Buckeyes are preparing the right way for the task at hand.

"You can't go in there timid or second-guessing yourself, you've got to really just let it loose," Stroud said. "That's how we've been practicing lately, these last couple of days have been really competitive and there's a lot more good on good. It's kind of just getting us ready for that moment."