

Michigan Loss Still Serving As Motivating Factor For Day, Ohio State



In his first four seasons at the helm for Ohio State, head coach Ryan Day has put his stamp on the program, leading the Buckeyes to a 45-6 overall record, two Big Ten championships, and three College Football Playoff Appearances

Despite the instant success for Day and Ohio State, back-to-back losses against Michigan have cast a looming cloud over the program, creating a hot topic of discussion that has continued through the offseason. At Big Ten Media Days Wednesday, Day addressed how last season's 45-23 loss to the Wolverines has impacted the Buckeyes heading into the 2023 campaign, as it has served as a daily dose of motivation for the program searching for its first National Championship since 2014.

"We know that," Day said. "We've talked about it. How much do we talk about the rivalry game and winning at the end of the season? We talk about it every day. We do. We're not going to sit there and let it beat us twice, but it is a motivating factor for sure."

Reflecting on the 2022 version of "The Game," Day admitted that his team fell flat in the second half due to their inability to absorb and recover from the Wolverines' explosive second-half scores. The Buckeyes relinquished three touchdowns of 45 yards or more in the final 30 minutes of action, highlighted by Michigan running back Donovan Edwards' 85-yard scamper late in the fourth quarter that extended the Wolverines' lead to two scores and presumably put the rivalry game away for Ohio State.

"We just didn't respond well in the second half when some of those big hits happened," Day said. "We had that long penalty, the holding, and then the 15-yarder, which is almost like a 50-yard penalty. We didn't respond great in the second half of that game."

The Buckeyes' failure to provide an answer to Michigan's long scores, coupled with the 42-41 last-second loss to Georgia in the 2022 Peach Bowl, has created a major point of emphasis for the program this offseason. Day has urged his players and staff to maintain a high level of focus through all four quarters, even when games may seem out of hand.

"As you replay a few plays here, a few plays there, really in both of those games, it's motivating," Day

said. "When you're in matchup games, it comes down to a handful of plays."

"There are times during the season where that's not the case," Day continued. "We can maybe lose a few plays and still win by a few touchdowns. It's like sometimes that can get unnoticed. Not that it does get unnoticed, but sometimes you don't feel the severity of it until you lose a game like that. We've been working hard this offseason to make sure that doesn't happen again, that in every game, no matter who we're playing, we understand that it can come down to a couple plays."

Although Ohio State has spent every day this offseason talking through the mistakes made against the Wolverines, Day also said that his team must not get into the trap of thinking too much about last year's results and too little about the season ahead. This, according to the Buckeyes' leader, is a fine line the team must straddle in 2023.

"It's something we talk about a lot, but we're not going to change what we do and how we prepare," Day said. "There are some things we talked about that we need to get done in that game. We looked long and hard at the whole game and figured out the areas where we need to do a better job, specifically. But the emphasis every day needs to be there."

Despite the consecutive losses to the Wolverines, Day assured those inside Lucas Oil Stadium on Wednesday that his program still possesses elite status — and they have the pieces in place to compete for a National Championship this season.

"When you lose the last game of the regular season, it's devastating," Day said. "And then you regroup, you swing as hard as you can against Georgia, and come a play or two short. If one of those plays goes another way, we're sitting here having a different conversation. But it didn't. So you have to trust the process."

"But when you look at the team that we have, you look at the guys we recruited, you look at the experience we have coming back, the leadership, the coaching staff, our culture right now," Day continued. "We've been to the (College Football Playoff) three of the last four years...There are so many different things (where) those boxes get checked. I think our program's as healthy as it's ever been, in terms of the type of people we're bringing in, the talent we're bringing in, the coaching staff we have. So we just have to keep growing and learning."