

Missouri Keying In On Ohio State's Rushing Attack In Cotton Bowl



The name of the game at Ohio State over the past few seasons has been an electric passing offense, but in the Cotton Bowl against Missouri, it could be the Buckeyes' rushing attack that determines who comes out on top on Friday at AT&T Stadium.

Not only will Ohio State be breaking in a new starting quarterback in Devin Brown, but it will likely be without star wideout Marvin Harrison Jr. and Julian Fleming, who entered the transfer portal earlier this month, with the duo combining for 1,381 yards and 14 touchdowns - all of the scores coming from Harrison - in 12 games this season.

With mostly unproven options at wideout beyond Emeka Egbuka and Xavier Johnson, it could lead to an expanded rushing attack for Ohio State, which received a boost on Wednesday when TreVeyon Henderson announced he will play in the Cotton Bowl. With 854 yards and 11 touchdowns this season, Henderson has the Tigers' defense on notice.

"The biggest thing, first and foremost, is stop the run," Missouri defensive coordinator Blake Baker said. "I think (Henderson) is as good a back as I have seen on tape all year. He's powerful, he's fast, he's dynamic out of the backfield. They will split him out and empty and get a mismatch. I think it starts and stops with him, to be honest with you."

A big game from Henderson is even more important given losses at the position, with Miyan Williams declaring for the NFL draft and both Evan Pryor and Chip Trayanum entering the transfer portal. But even with Dallan Hayden as the only other scholarship running back on the roster, Henderson is still more than most teams can handle.

"Just keeping your eyes on him, making sure when you do have the opportunity to tackle him, we've got to make it," linebacker Chuck Hicks said. "There's times that we've missed things and kind of had a bad leverage on them. We just didn't make the tackle happen. That's where we've just got to make the tackle when it comes to us."

Hicks is not a usual starter for the Tigers, however, as Missouri will be without several linebackers against Ohio State, including Chad Bailey and Ty'Ron Hopper, as well as cornerback Ennis Rakestraw

Jr. But Missouri is confident that it has the depth to compete with the Buckeyes despite being without several key playmakers.

“Ennis, he’s the voice for the cornerbacks, so Marcus (Clarke) and Drey (Norwood), they’re doing a good job stepping up,” cornerback Kris Abrams-Draine said. “And Triston (Newson) and all the other linebackers, they’re doing a good job stepping up, so I think they’ll be up for it.”

That being said, Ohio State will still look to operate through the air. Even with Harrison and Fleming both expected out, the Buckeyes still have Egbuka and Johnson in addition to Carnell Tate and Brandon Inniss, as well as tight end Cade Stover, who also confirmed Wednesday that he will play in the Cotton Bowl.

“They have a lot of different playmakers they get the ball to,” Abrams-Draine said. “They have a good quarterback, good running backs. They’re Ohio State, so we’ve just got to be dialed in and locked in.”