

Ohio State Defensive Front Preparing For Bennett's Rushing Ability



The Ohio State defense has had to battle dual-threat quarterbacks on numerous occasions this season, however its most daunting challenge to date approaches against top-ranked Georgia in the Chick-Fil-A Peach Bowl on Dec. 31.

Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett has emerged as a threat to opposing defenses through the air and on the ground while leading the Bulldogs to the College Football Playoff national title last season and the SEC crown this year. Bennett rode his 68.1 percent completion percentage, 3,425 passing yards and 20 passing touchdowns to an appearance in New York City as a Heisman Trophy finalist. However, the stress that he can put on a defense with his legs is one of his most defining traits, which aided him to rush for 184 yards and seven touchdowns on 47 carries this season.

While the Buckeyes have struggled against scrambling quarterbacks all season — notably Toledo's Dequan Finn and Maryland's Taulia Tagovailoa — defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau said Ohio State's defensive front will just need to stick to their assignments against Bennett.

"Stetson Bennett is a great player, a great quarterback," Tuimoloau said. "I think we have to do our job and trust in each other. He has shown times he can be very elusive, and I think we have to stick to the game plan and trust one another and do our job."

Ohio State linebacker Steele Chambers echoed Tuimoloau's sentiment, while also noting that Bennett has a bag of moves that he digs into when he gets out in space.

"I think it just comes down to doing your job and just trusting the guy next to you that whatever his assignment is, he is going to get it done," Chambers said. "Stetson Bennett is a great player. He's got this weird little dead leg thing he does, that's annoying, whenever he is out in open space. But he's a great player, and I think it's going to take 11 guys to really stop him and stop that entire offense."

As previously mentioned, Ohio State has typically shown cracks defensively against scrambling quarterbacks. The Buckeyes allowed Finn to gash them for 70 yards and a touchdown on the ground, while both of his passing touchdowns were also the result of him extending the play on Sept. 17. The Buckeyes' struggles continued to show against Maryland, in which Tagovailoa rushed for 37 yards — not including sack yardage — and a touchdown, while Michigan's J.J. McCarthy added 27 yards and a touchdown a week later in the Wolverines 45-23 rout of the Buckeyes.

While scrambling quarterbacks have given Ohio State fits all season, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said there's a balance between allowing its pass rushers to attack aggressively while also reining them in to be prepared for the quarterback to scramble.

"You work on it all the time, but like I've always said, it's a balance," Knowles said. "You don't want to hold your rush men back. You want those guys to be able to go. But you have to operate with fundamentals, with the knowledge of how this guy likes to scramble or at least create room for himself and where he moves to.

"So you establish game plans, and you show your guys and you illustrate it, but at the same time, you don't want them holding back. It's part of the game. It happens at all levels," he continued. "But if you're going to be effective in your pass rush, you got to be able to go. You just have to have knowledge of the seams and operate on multiple levels and have other players with eyes. That's important, have eyes on him, to be able to react to the scramble."