

Ohio State Quarterback Will Howard Ready To Thrive Under Chip Kelly-Led Offense



Although he has spent just two months inside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, Ohio State senior quarterback Will Howard has already experienced some significant change to start his Buckeyes' career.

Howard, who transferred in from Kansas State on Jan. 4, spent the latter half of January and beginning of February under the impression that longtime offensive coach Bill O'Brien — who was hired as Ohio State's offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach on Jan. 19 — would be guiding him through his one and only season in Columbus. That reality quickly changed on Feb. 9 when O'Brien left Ohio State to become head coach at Boston College, and a few hours later, Howard had a new veteran offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach in former UCLA head coach Chip Kelly.

Speaking with the media for the first time since the coaching change at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on March 4, Howard acknowledged that the start to his Ohio State career has been a unique one with many twists and turns. But with Kelly now firmly supplanted in his role, Howard is excited to put the coaching carousel behind him and learn from his vastly experienced play-caller this season.

"Yeah, it was definitely the quickest turnaround I think I've had in offensive coordinators (in my career)," Howard said. "But, obviously, we totally understand Coach O'Brien had to do what he had to do. And it made a lot of sense for him and his family. So there was no love lost at all.

"But I think the move we made with getting Coach Kelly as quick as we did showed you how invested Coach Day is this year and how much we've invested in this year. Because that's a heck of a hire. And he's a really good dude to be around and to learn from."

Howard said that he was excited to hear the news that the former UCLA head coach would be replacing O'Brien because he has seen the coach cultivate efficient and high-flying offenses throughout his time in the collegiate and NFL coaching ranks. The quarterback specifically mentioned Kelly's successes calling

plays for Oregon from 2007-12 as something that impressed him most — where he helped the Ducks run a high-flying, hurry-up offense that often bewildered Pac-12 opponents — along with the way he led the Philadelphia Eagles during his first stint as an NFL head coach from 2013-16.

“I think the first thing that came to mind was — I thought of those Oregon offenses that he used to run and how prolific they were, how great their run and pass game was. And I grew up an Eagles fan, he coached the Eagles, so that was really cool. So there were a lot of different things that went into it.”

Howard, who will take the practice field tomorrow for spring camp as the presumed starter, said that he has also been impressed with the way his coordinator has simplified the offense and his responsibilities as quarterback. He added that Kelly has helped him come to the understanding that his role is similar to a point guard in basketball, where he is tasked with quickly and accurately facilitating the ball to his playmakers on the perimeter — those being wideouts Emeka Egbuka, Brandon Inness, Carnell Tate, and Brandon Inness along with running backs TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins.

“(He has) a ton of knowledge, he’s been around, knows everyone,” Howard said. “And his schemes are really, really quarterback friendly. I think that the things that he does are easy, it’s not a lot of manipulation. It’s, ‘How can we get as many yards as possible without any strain?’ It’s a lot of really good stuff that he’s done.”

“It’s just easy throws,” he added. “I think he does a lot of good stuff in the RPO world. A lot of the things that he’s trying to teach us is that we don’t have to work harder, we just need to work smarter. Getting the ball out to these guys on the outside that we have, and letting them go make plays in space is going to be really big for us this year. Basically, (I’m) just the point guard out there. (I) just have to distribute the ball and get yards however we can.”

Regardless of his impression of Kelly as an innovative and effective offensive play caller, Howard said that both him and the offense’s success this season will ultimately come down to how he and Kelly mesh and build chemistry off the field, an integral quality that he thinks the pair is already well on their way of achieving ahead of spring camp.

“He’s super down to earth and easy to talk to,” Howard said. “I think that’s one of the most important things that I’ve realized in my time as a quarterback. We spend so much time with our offensive coordinator/quarterback coach, it’s so important to have that relationship. And if you don’t, then things can go sideways. And I’ve experienced that. I think the best thing about him is that he’s just normal. He’s a normal guy. He, going to sit there and talk with us about whatever’s going on. He’s obviously very smart and football savvy, but what comes first is relating to us and hanging out with us. And that’s big.”