

Ohio State's Defense Preparing For "Big Challenge" With Michigan's Rushing Attack



Michigan cruised to a 45-23 win over Ohio State last season in Ohio Stadium, and it was without one of the program's best players in running back Blake Corum. This time around, with the Buckeyes visiting the Wolverines in Ann Arbor, Corum will be full-go as he looks to make an impact in The Game.

Corum has rushed 180 times for 888 yards and 20 touchdowns this season - most in the country - and is averaging 4.9 yards per attempt. Beyond Corum, Michigan's rushing attack also boast junior Donovan Edwards, who has not had quite the statistical outing he did last season but has still carried the ball 95 times for 337 yards (3.4 yards per carry) and three scores.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles is acutely aware of the challenge presented by Michigan's tailbacks, and said that stopping the run is often a deciding factor when it comes to winning in The Game.

"They do a great job of hiding their formations and their intent, and offensive line is as good as we've faced and the backs are really good," Knowles said on Tuesday. "When you look in the history of this game - The Game - it starts there. You have to do that. I think the balance becomes, OK, how do you prevent the explosive plays on the back end with not over committing to this and leaving yourself exposed here? That's the real balancing act."

That balancing act will be an important one considering that Michigan has a veteran quarterback in J.J. McCarthy. While he has not looked like his usual self over the last few games with Jim Harbaugh not allowed to coach in-game, he showed last season that he can burn Ohio State if given the chance, throwing three explosive touchdowns against the Buckeyes.

But with a healthy Corum and a reliable option in Edwards, the focus of Michigan's attack - which is the nation's No. 11 scoring offense at 38.3 points but is just No. 53 in total offense at 399.6 yards - will lay within the rushing offense.

"It's a big challenge. It's unusual," Knowles said. "Everybody has to understand the scheme and the gap fits and there's an exactness that comes with it that I think a lot of people don't understand. ... All of a sudden, there's a lot of different gaps. Their running backs are talented and their offensive line is talented and so there really is an exactness and a preciseness that our players need to understand, and

that's my job. My job is to get them to understand by Saturday and be able to do it fast."

And Michigan has had no qualms about relying on the rushing attack this season. Beyond Corum leading the country in rushing touchdowns, the Wolverines had arguably their most impressive rushing performance of the season against Penn State on Oct. 21. In the 24-15 win, Michigan closed the game out with 32 consecutive runs, completely wearing out the Nittany Lions' defense in the process, and that's a challenge Ohio State will have to be prepared for.

"That just shows me they have great confidence in their running game, they have great confidence in their defense, right? A team that's willing to do that is willing to play the long game, the four-quarter game, and trust their defense and their offensive line and running backs," Knowles said. "It shows me that we better be ready to slug it out for four plus quarters or whatever it takes."