

Practice Makes Perfect For Ohio State On Final Drive



On a cool late September evening in South Bend, Ind., Ohio State head coach Ryan Day and his offense saw 65 yards and 1:25 standing in the way of a potentially improbable road win against then-No. 9 Notre Dame.

What followed was a memorable 12-play drive that featured five key third-and-fourth-down conversions and a 1-yard Chip Trayanum touchdown, a season-altering sequence of events that gave the then-sixth ranked Buckeyes a stunning 17-14 victory. While the millions of fans watching both on T.V. and historic Notre Dame Stadium were stunned by the game-winning drive, those within the Buckeyes' locker room saw it instead as a product of the preparation they put in throughout the week to come out of the top-10 matchup victorious.

"We practice those two minute situations all the time," quarterback Kyle McCord said. "At that point it was just reverting back to our training. My job is to get the ball in the hands of the playmakers and let them do special things, and that's exactly what it was. It wasn't perfect by any means, but at the end of the day we found a way to make it work and that's all that matters."

McCord, who orchestrated third-down conversions of 10, 7 and 19 yards, respectively along with a successful fourth-down attempt of seven yards on the final drive, said he and his offense spent a good portion of last week's practices preparing for the high-pressure situations that may arise against the then-undefeated Fighting Irish. This, according to the junior gunslinger, helped the entire unit stay cool, calm and collected amidst a tough road environment late in the fourth quarter, with their own undefeated season on the line.

"That's a tribute to our practice habits," McCord said. "You always say you want to practice like the game, and we're out there at the Woody running those plays with nobody out there and it's quiet, then you get out here and you have to perfect it in front of millions of people and that's exactly what we did. That's just a tribute to reps on reps on reps and guys making plays when their number is called."

"Those are situations we put ourselves in in practice, so we just try to rely on our training and just do everything the way we knew how to do it," said junior wideout Emeka Egbuka, who caught two third-

down completions that helped extend the game-winning drive. “We knew it was two minute, we knew we had to go quick, get some easy completions. Kyle did a phenomenal job. You saw poise back there delivering great passes. We made a couple huge third- and fourth-down conversions and that was really big.”

According to Day, these types of conversations continued into the hours leading up to the game. This, in his mind, helped his offense remain focused on the game plan they prepared all week.

“We spent some time talking about the two-minute (drill) today,” Day said. “When you work a game plan, you just keep grinding and you keep working and you keep working all the way up until four hours before the game. We met with the receivers, we showed what we were expecting in that moment, and you never know exactly what you’re going to get.”

With a full week’s worth of preparation for Notre Dame translating to success on the field when it mattered most, McCord said his offense can continue to rely on these habits — along with the already stellar skill sets — to achieve their lofty goals in 2023.

“We’re never out of it until there’s no time left on the clock,” McCord said. “As long as we have the ball and we have some time left, the sky is the limit for this offense. I thought the O-line did a really good job, the running backs too in pass protection. It wasn’t perfect, but at the end of the day the receivers did a really good job of getting open and understanding what they were trying to do defensively. It was almost backyard football-esque there at the end just trying to find the open guy. We did that, and the rest is history.”