

Predictions: Luck Of The Irish No Match For Streaking Buckeyes



After a month of bulldozing their way through the College Football Playoff, the Buckeyes have just one more game left this season, win or lose. Two historic programs, Ohio State and Notre Dame, match up for the national championship game on Monday.

The Buckeyes have won their three games by a combined 59 points and are nearly 10-point favorites, but as both coaches have said in the lead up to the game, that won't matter when 7:30 p.m. comes.

Here's how the BSB staff sees this game going:

Patrick Engels: Buckeyes Pull Away Late To Win National Title

After an eventful season that has been filled with the highest of highs and lowest of lows, Ohio State finds itself just one win away from permanent glory, squaring off with former Buckeye Marcus Freeman and No. 7 seed Notre Dame in the national championship game.

While many experts around the country believe Ohio State will cruise to its seventh consensus national title and its first since 2014, I think it will be a much more daunting task to dethrone the Irish, and it seems Day is on board with that sentiment based on all the praise he's given to Freeman and Notre Dame this whole week.

Notre Dame can certainly pose a significant challenge to the talented Buckeyes. They are incredibly well-coached, seem to make all the winning and momentum-swinging plays and play a physical, run-first brand of football that has given OSU some fits in recent history.

If the Fighting Irish are going to compete and have a shot at a title in this one, they will look to turn this game into an ugly war similar to what Michigan — and even Texas at times — did. That means controlling the time of possession with star running back Jeremiyah Love and then keeping the ball out of Ohio State's offensive star's hands and avoiding explosive plays on defense.

Entering the game with the nation's 14th-ranked rushing offense (210.8 yards per game) and second-ranked scoring defense (14.3 points per game) and passing defense (165.3 yards allowed per game), the Irish certainly have the capabilities to pull off what would be a big upset in the title game.

But, this Irish team is running into an absolute buzzsaw in Ohio State, who — as our very own Cameron Moone pointed out in his latest “Moone’s Landing” column — has found a way to win in multiple different ways in the College Football Playoff.

I see this one going more like the Texas game than the first two blowout wins over Tennessee and Oregon, where the Buckeyes will have to overcome some real adversity and make winning plays down the stretch to edge out the Irish.

This is where the Buckeyes’ top-rated defense will come into play. Riley Leonard is a gamer, but he has struggled to throw the ball down the field all year — he averages 173.7 yards per game and has 19 touchdowns to eight interceptions — a weakness that he exposed against Ohio State’s vaunted secondary and pass rush.

I see Ohio State’s secondary shutting down Notre Dame’s passing offense mostly all night and the pass rush getting to both Leonard and Love due to the Irish coming into this one with a bit of a patchwork offensive line. Because of these factors, I just don’t see the Irish scoring more than 20 points, which could make it hard for them to win this one.

Because of that, the Buckeyes’ path to victory on offense is to return to their explosive style of play and limit turnovers, something they had a bit of a hard time doing against Texas. It certainly won’t be an easy task against a ball-hawking Notre Dame defense that ranks No. 1 in turnovers gained (32), but if Will Howard can simply take what the defense gives them and connect on one or two shots down the field, the Buckeyes should have the clear advantage in this one.

With all this said, I see Ohio State struggling some out of the gates to a close contest at halftime but playing an almost spotless brand of football in the second half, holding the Irish without another touchdown in the game and tacking on a pair of scores of their own to hold a relatively comfortable advantage by the mid-to-late fourth quarter.

By that time in the game, I think the Buckeyes will have things wrapped up and begin celebrating what is one of the more impressive national championships in major collegiate sports in quite some time.

Ohio State 24, Notre Dame 13

Bobby Gorbett: Buckeyes Defense Shuts Down Irish

After playing some of their best football for the last three games, the Buckeyes have made it to their first national championship since 2020. Ohio State’s dominant performances against Tennessee and Oregon and clutch performance against Texas have it as the unquestioned favorite against Notre Dame.

Boasting a loaded secondary that has only yielded 194.7 passing yards per game in three playoff games, the Fighting Irish defense is among the best the Buckeyes have faced all season.

In the same respect, although Notre Dame has gone through difficult teams week after week in the playoffs, head coach Marcus Freeman’s bunch hasn’t seen an offense as talented as Ohio State’s all season.

On the other side of the ball, the Buckeyes have been arguably the best defense in all of college football since a midseason loss to Oregon. The talented unit has already shut down a high-powered offenses like Texas and Oregon throughout long stretches of their two most recent playoff games.

As good as Notre Dame's offense has been at times this season I find it hard to believe they'll have sustained success in the national championship. The Fighting Irish have a solid quarterback in Riley Leonard, but the Buckeyes have gone against better receivers in their previous two playoff matchups.

I see the Buckeyes loading the box to take away the Fighting Irish rushing attack, and relying on cornerbacks like Denzel Burke, Davison Igbinosun and Jermaine Mathews in the secondary.

Unless a couple of Buckeyes get injured or play their worst game of the season, I would be very surprised to see Notre Dame surpassing the 27 points it scored against Penn State. Frankly, I don't see them getting very close to that number,

Offensively, the Buckeyes may have issues if the Fighting Irish take away their running game, but I still think freshman receiver Jeremiah Smith will provide the needed explosive punch for his team to score more than enough points.

With all of that in mind, I think Ohio State would have to play far from its best to lose to Notre Dame, and based on how the playoffs have gone so far, I think that's very unlikely. **Ohio State 27, Notre Dame 14**

Cameron Moone: Buckeyes Outlast Irish In Hard-Fought Battle

It is at last here.

After dethroning three College Football Playoff teams, No. 8-seed Ohio State has the chance to capture its first national championship in a decade by taking on No. 7-seed Notre Dame in Atlanta on Monday.

The Buckeyes have looked nearly superhuman in three straight college football games, beating each of their opposing teams by two-plus scores, including a 41-21 romping of top-seeded Oregon on New Year's Day in the Rose Bowl. Whatever offensive coordinator Chip Kelly has wanted to get, he's gotten; either on the ground with TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins (371 rushing yards, nine total touchdowns) or through the air with Emeka Egbuka, Carnell Tate and Jeremiah Smith (612 receiving yards).

Notre Dame has played their game throughout its playoff run, establishing a dominant run game behind the legs of transfer quarterback Riley Leonard, as the former Duke Blue Devil has topped 30 yards rushing in each of the three playoff games. A hampered Jeremiyah Love has also contributed on the ground, notching a 98-yard touchdown run against Indiana in the opening round.

This game will undoubtedly come down to defense and turnovers. Notre Dame is one of the most efficient teams in the country, tallying a nation-leading 32 turnovers (13 fumble recoveries, 19 interceptions). Ohio State quarterback Will Howard will need to play the cleanest game of the season in order for the Buckeyes to be in a position to capture the national crown.

If Notre Dame sticks to its usual man defense, much like Oregon did when Smith erupted for 187 yards and two touchdowns, then it'll be fireworks for the Buckeyes. If Howard hands the ball over to Notre Dame two or three times, the Fighting Irish will party like it's 1988. **Ohio State 34, Notre Dame 24**

Greg Wilson: Buckeyes Blow Out Irish For Day's First Title

The entire season has been leading to this. Beating Michigan and winning the Big Ten Championship

weren't in the cards for the current OSU team, but now they can completely erase the last four years of coming up short and immortalize themselves in Buckeye lore.

There have been times when this team has come into games possibly a little overconfident during the last couple of years, and as 8.5-point favorites, and seemingly everyone counting out the Irish before this game based on how Ohio State has been playing the last three games, some might think that could happen again.

But this team is too determined, and too motivated to come into this game not playing with the same intensity it has been that has helped it win like it has in the first ever 12-team playoff.

I don't think Jeremiah Smith will be able to be contained for two straight games and I expect him to break out, especially if the Irish are going to be adamant about sticking with man coverage, although I'm sure the safeties will be shading toward the side of the field he's lined up on.

The Buckeyes just have too many weapons on the offensive side of the ball, and if pass protection is as good as it has been ever since the guards began rotating more, there's going to be no stopping Will Howard or the receiving corps.

This Notre Dame offense also isn't the best that Ohio State has seen this year, and Jim Knowles has the defense playing at its best at the right time, reaching the potential it has always had.

All of that being said, Marcus Freeman and the Fighting Irish boast the No. 2 scoring defense in the country, behind only Ohio State, and the No. 6 scoring offense. This Ohio State team might feel unstoppable right now, but we have seen them falter at times against worse teams.

But I do think the run continues, and Ryan Day gets his first championship as head coach at Ohio State.
Ohio State 38, Notre Dame 21