

Predictions: No. 6 Ohio State Wins Close Fight With No. 9 Notre Dame



Ohio State's long-awaited battle with Notre Dame has finally arrived, with the sixth-ranked Buckeyes set to travel to the ninth-ranked Fighting Irish in South Bend, Ind., for a 7:30 p.m. kickoff on Saturday.

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— Ohio State Football (@OhioStateFB) September 21, 2023

With this set to be one of the most even matchups Ohio State will play all season, here are our staff predictions for the Buckeyes' marquee contest against Notre Dame. Check BuckeyeSports.com every Friday for the latest staff predictions.

Patrick Engels: Ohio State will have a significant challenge on their hands in South Bend as sixth-year Sam Hartman may be one of the best — if not the best, sorry J.J. McCarthy — quarterbacks they face all season. Hartman, who Day compared to former Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett on Thursday, has completely changed the tenor of this Notre Dame offense. Unlike last year, they're attacking defenses with vertical shots down the field, which has caused them to average over 500 yards and 40 points per game. I think the Buckeyes' secondary will be up for the challenge of Hartman and the new-look passing offense, however, as Denzel Burke, Davison Igbinosun, Sonny Styles and others have shown signs of brilliance so far this season.

Having said that, I think this game will ultimately come down to two things. One, can Ohio State win the battle in the trenches? And two, can Kyle McCord lead his offense to a statement road win?

The Irish have one of the better offensive lines in the country, led by first-team All-American Joe Alt, along with one of the more productive running backs in the nation in Audric Estime. This will be a huge test for the Buckeye rushmen, who seemed to have awoken last week after two sluggish games. If J.T. Tuimoloau, Jack Sawyer and others can get after Hartman and limit the run, they should have a great chance to come away with a victory on Saturday night.

But I think the game will ultimately be determined by the play of McCord and this Ohio State offense.

McCord's teammates seem to think that he is ready for the moment, which should give him the confidence he needs to go out there and perform. Coupled with the plethora of offensive weapons he has in his arsenal, I think he'll be more than capable of performing under the Notre Dame Stadium lights.

I entered this week leaning towards picking a Notre Dame victory, but after hearing Day say his offense is going to "let it rip," it swayed my opinion. I think Ohio State will play with a similar intensity and edge that they had last year against Georgia, propelling them to a hard-fought road victory against the Irish. I have the Buckeyes winning in a nail-biter, led by a late fourth quarter drive by McCord along with a key defensive stop. **Ohio State 30, Notre Dame 27**

Braden Moles: Maybe I'm out on a limb here, but I don't see this as quite the battle that some others do. I certainly think it will be a good game - and certainly one that Ohio State's starters will remain in until the fourth quarter - but I'm hard-pressed to think that Notre Dame - which returns most of last year's team outside of the addition of Hartman - will suddenly exert its will on the Buckeyes.

Hartman is a solid, if not slightly overrated, quarterback, but he's a definite upgrade over what the Fighting Irish had last season. But who exactly is he throwing to? Notre Dame's best wide receiver last season (excluding tight end Michael Mayer, who is a definite loss for the Fighting Irish) is now play cornerback at Ohio State. The running backs are good, as my colleagues have pointed out, but there's been no reason to believe the Buckeyes won't be able to stand up to the run.

I think this one will ultimately come down to a calm and collected performance from McCord. Notre Dame needs a lot of things to go right in this one, starting with a few turnovers to help limit Ohio State's possessions. But if the offensive line can keep McCord upright - and that's a big if against one of the better defensive lines the Buckeyes have seen so far this season - and McCord can limit his mistakes, I don't know if this one remains all that close.

Given how Ohio State's defense has played this season, I'm very interested in how it performs against a more balanced team than anything else they've faced this season, with Indiana primarily rushing the ball and Western Kentucky almost exclusively passing. Notre Dame does a little bit of both, but I think the defense is up to the challenge, and I don't have as many questions about the offense after last week's performance. **Ohio State 35, Notre Dame 21**

Greg Wilson: It's going to be McCord's first time under the lights in a top-10 matchup like this against the Fighting Irish. He has been improving with every new week, and it all is supposed to be for big games like this. Saturday is going to be the real test of whether the offense can still match up against some of the best teams in the country, and whether the defenses hot start is for real.

Hartman is starting his 50th game at the college level and McCord is starting his fifth. The difference of experience of the two quarterbacks is about as vast as it can be, but McCord has been around the system for a few years at this point, so I don't think the environment will be too much for him to handle. Teammates have made a point to talk about how cool, calm and collected he is.

Last week, the Buckeyes were able to focus heavily on Austin Reed's pass game, and they stopped it very effectively. This week is a different story since Notre Dame is a run first team, but Hartman has the ability to throw the deep ball as well. Their offensive line is one of the best in the country and will give the Buckeyes front four trouble. If the linebackers and secondary keep playing as well as they have to this point, it's going to be a great game.

I think the game comes down to late in the fourth quarter, but ultimately Ohio State pulls it out. **Ohio State 27, Notre Dame 20**