

Regardless Of Position, Demario McCall Sees ‘Bigger Role’ In Ohio State’s 2019 Offense



Midway through the 2017 season, Demario McCall started his move from running back to H-back, uncertain of where he would fit into Ohio State’s offense loaded with weapons at several skill spots.

While the Buckeyes went with J.K. Dobbins and Mike Weber at running back, McCall spent the 2018 campaign behind incumbent starting H-backs Parris Campbell and K.J. Hill, in addition to backup C.J. Saunders.

As the OSU offense took off under quarterback Dwayne Haskins, McCall bounced around roles from H-back to running back and special teams before he eventually found his way back into the fold down the stretch.

“(The Rose Bowl) experience for me was great,” McCall, who rushed twice for 12 yards Jan. 1 in the 28-23 victory against Washington, told BSB. “I mean, I feel like I’ve built the trust of the coaches to put me in the game — especially in big games like this. I just feel like what I did was build my way to a huge role next year and just looking forward to the future.”

What exactly will McCall’s role be when Ohio State picks things back up for 2019? Since the Buckeyes’ 2016 recruiting class signed the four-star McCall as the 247Sports composite’s No. 44 overall prospect, No. 2 all-purpose back and No. 3 player in Ohio from North Ridgeville, fans have been asking the same question.

McCall started at running back in 2016 and 2017 before he made his move to H-back midway through the latter season after complications from sports hernia surgery that spring flared up in the fall and sidelined him for the final 10 games. Stashed behind Campbell and Hill as he clawed his way through development at H-back in 2018, McCall built up trust with OSU’s coaching staff and saw the chance to learn from several of the team’s top leaders.

“At the beginning, (moving to H-back) was kind of tough because I didn’t know where I fit in and where they could use me,” McCall said. “But then once I got my role and I knew that was my job, what I needed to work on, I was fine with it. I’ll do whatever I have to do to contribute to the team.

“I learned a ton. (Campbell and Hill), those guys are great leaders. I don’t think I could have done this

with any other guys here. Those guys — (Campbell), (Johnnie Dixon), Terry (McLaurin), K.J. — all the older guys did a great job of developing us and just being great leaders in the room and Zone 6's room (of wide receivers). I was in the room for probably a whole year, starting from the spring. Those guys did a great job of being leaders, man, just telling us how to do it and what to do."

The 5-9, 193-pound McCall enters his fourth-year junior campaign with improved versatility and consistency after time spent at H-back, running back and kick returner. In 10 games, he compiled eight carries for 50 yards (6.2 average) with a long of 15 and recorded nine receptions for 110 yards (12.2 average) with a long of 33, adding 10 kick returns for 195 yards (19.5 average) and a long of 42.

Among the flashes, McCall had ups and downs Nov. 24 in Ohio State's 62-39 rout of Michigan, but he hauled in a 33-yard wheel route — among two receptions for 42 yards that day — from Haskins in the second quarter to set up a score before halftime. His improved ability catching passes out of the backfield, in addition to guidance from the veterans ahead of him, can be traced back to wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

"Coach Hartline's a great coach, man," McCall said. "He's somebody that we can relate to and he's been through it — not long ago, but recently — so it's all like he knows exactly what he's talking about, man. He's a great guy to play for — great coach, great person off the field and I just feel like he's a great coach, man."

While the Buckeyes return Dobbins, Weber declared for the NFL draft and Brian Snead parted ways with the program, leaving a hole at running back as Master Teague and Marcus Crowley step up. OSU's offense has options for McCall, whose speed and versatility figures to find more time on the field regardless of position.

"Fans should expect a good role — a bigger role next year," McCall said. "I mean, I've got big shoes to fill just being the athlete that I am."

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