

Resetting The Summer: Deep Running Back Room An Asset



Every Saturday leading into the start of Ohio State's fall camp, Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be giving an outlook on each of the team's position groups. This week's position is running back.

Four of Ohio State's five scholarship running backs have starting experience, and the only one that doesn't is a former top-100 prospect.

The Buckeyes have fantastic depth in their running back room this season, and if it's any sort of repeat of last year, they'll be glad it's available. 2022 featured a season-ending injury to Evan Pryor in fall camp, multiple missed games by starters TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams. Walk-on T.C. Caffey even got a season-ender after showing flashes against Toledo in week three for good measure.

Ohio State still saw production, averaging 5.4 yards per carry as a team, but couldn't consistently run the ball against Georgia in the College Football Playoff semifinals and had to resort to converting then-linebacker Chip Trayanum back to running back, which he previously played at Arizona State before transferring to Columbus.

Previous edition: Quarterbacks In Competition

Here's the situation for Ohio State entering fall camp:

Projected starters: TreVeyon Henderson (Jr.), Miyan Williams (r-Jr.)

Depth Pieces: Evan Pryor (r-So.), Chip Trayanum (r-Sr.), Dallan Hayden (So.)

Young player to watch: Hayden

Breakdown: With a lot of proven assets at running back headlined by a top talent searching for a resurgent year, the only question leading into fall camp is how all of them will be deployed. It's hard to imagine a scenario where any more than three can see the field in a major way, barring injury.

Henderson is expected to be a feature back once again, the former No. 1 running back recruit and five-star prospect in the class of 2021. He broke out with 1,248 yards and 19 total touchdowns, an Ohio State freshman record, in his first-year campaign.

Last season, though, a broken foot suffered during the opening weeks of OSU's schedule hampered his efforts the rest of the year. He played in just eight games, rushing for only 571 yards with a per-carry average that dipped from 6.8 the year prior to 5.3.

If he can live up to the buzz he generated during his recruitment and during his opening acts fresh out of high school, the potential is there for him to be one of the best backs in the country.

That's not to discount Williams, who split carries with Henderson and played really good football — again, when healthy. Across 11 games he picked up 825 yards with an average of 6.4 per tote. It will be interesting to see how running backs coach Tony Alford rolls both with each other.

Pryor put together a phenomenal spring game performance in 2022 and has perhaps the most speed of anyone in the room, plus a 1,000-yard receiving season dating back to high school that shows he could get on the field in more versatile ways. An ACL tear is always a tough recovery, though, and playing time could be hard to come by this season.

Trayanum had one of Ohio State's best offensive performances against Michigan a year ago, one of the few things working for the Buckeyes offensively that day. In 14 carries, he picked up 84 yards (5.9 per rush) and caught a pass for 14 yards. Another longer reception of his was called back for a holding penalty.

Then there's Hayden, who took over as starter for the Indiana and Maryland games as a freshman only to post 100-yard outings in both contests. He ran in three touchdowns in the latter affair.

Trayanum and Hayden both put together strong springs, Henderson out of contact drills for precautionary reasons and Williams and Pryor both out altogether. Both were getting consistent yardage behind an in-flux offensive line during practices open to the media.

After not landing any of its running back targets from the recruiting class of 2023, there will be no freshmen on scholarship for Ohio State this year. But plenty of depth awaits before the next wave hits — three ball carriers are committed for the class of 2024.