

Running Game Remains An Area Of Concern For Day



Ohio State's running game came under the microscope, once again, following the Buckeyes' 21-7 win over Northwestern on Saturday.

The Buckeyes did show marginal improvements from the previous two weeks, in which they rushed for less than 100 yards against Iowa and Penn State, respectively, but still left much to be desired within their ground game against the Wildcats. Head coach Ryan Day lamented his team's performance on Saturday and noted that there need to be holistic improvements within the running game.

"We all need to do better," Day said. "Going back and watching the film, we have to block better, we have to run better. We have to try to do a better job of equating numbers, all of the above. In games where they know you're going to run it, you have to come up with answers. But, just moving forward in general, we know we can do a better job. We'll get back to work this week and get after it."

Ohio State's rushing statistics weren't too shabby, as the Buckeyes ran for 207 yards on an average of 5.9 yards per attempt while scoring all three of their touchdowns on the ground, however, the eye test told a different story. The Buckeyes struggled to gain ground in short-yardage situations — including a possession in which they were stuffed on third-and-1 and fourth-and-1 early in the second quarter. Ohio State also utilized longer-developing stretch runs on several first downs and in short-yardage situations but saw limited success on those plays.

As struggles in short yardage once again popped up for the Buckeyes against the Wildcats, Day noted that he was not pleased with how his team operated in those situations.

"Of all the things that I was disappointed with on Saturday with running the football, short yardage was the one high on the list," Day said. "You know they're all going to be in (the box) and we have to convert in those situations. I think it was a combination of things."

“We didn’t quite get the movement we wanted to,” he continued. “We didn’t quite enter the blocks the right way. You’ll see a couple of them where we’re not flush on the blocks.”

The Buckeyes did find some success by utilizing unorthodox methods, in the form of sending quarterback C.J. Stroud on runs, as well as turning to wide receiver Emeka Egbuka on jet sweeps. Stroud rushed for a career-best 79 yards while Egbuka provided Ohio State with its first touchdown of the afternoon on an end-around during the late stages of the second quarter.

Day said that he felt he could have turned to Stroud a little more as a runner, but emphasized that creativity is an important aspect of a healthy running game.

“That’s where a lot of those big plays came from, were some of those types of plays,” Day said. “When you go sideways, you run the risk of having negative plays. We had a couple that did happen that way. When you’re in a game like that and you’re in second-and-14, that’s not a good place to be with that type of environment.”