

# Ryan Day Excited For “Historic” First-Round Matchup With Tennessee In College Football Playoff



After a week of intense speculation and fallout from the Michigan loss, Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day now get to move forward to the College Football Playoff, where they will begin their quest at a national championship on Dec. 21 with a primetime first-round matchup with No. 9 seed Tennessee at Ohio Stadium.

Although the three-point loss to Michigan still stings and will continue to sting for years to come, the Buckeyes have fully moved onto their next challenge, which Day said will provide his team with a unique opportunity that he and his team are excited to take on.

“We’re fired up,” Day said at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center just hours after the 12-team bracket was revealed. “We’re obviously excited about playing the first-ever playoff game in Ohio Stadium. Ohio Stadium’s been around a long time, over 100 years, there has been a lot of great games, but never a playoff game like this. Night game, 8 p.m., it’s going to be electric. Our guys are going to be excited about this.”

Day, who said his team watched the CFP selection show together on Saturday afternoon, told local media and those listening on Zoom that his team now must put all the focus on how they can get past a talented Tennessee team, one which is top eight in the nation in both scoring offense and scoring defense. For the Buckeyes’ head coach, this will come by not only preparing for the Volunteers but also working to fix some of the things that his team did not do well against the Wolverines.

He mentioned the team’s offensive line play and their overall offensive execution as aspects that Ohio State needs to drastically improve upon if they want to defeat the Volunteers, weaknesses that Day said caused him to spend more time with the offense this past week to get things back on the right track.

“Last week, it was a mixed bag of identifying the things that didn’t go well, working through that. You don’t just move on (from the Michigan loss) after a day or two,” Day said. “But now that we have a target, we said, ‘Listen, we’re going to flush that out.’ We got back on the field. We got into the weekend and said, ‘Okay, we got to learn from it. We have to fix the problems.’ ”

“It’s not going to do us any good looking back on that. We have to learn from it and move on. The guys have a good look in their eye. We were up there at noon watching the selection show. There was great energy. They want to play. They want to get back on the field to get a win.”

While restructuring the offensive line and returning the offense to their once-explosive form could certainly boost the Buckeyes’ chances come Dec. 21, they could also receive a boost from playing a single-elimination game in their home stadium in the heart of December, where temperatures, as of Saturday, are projected to reach a low of 28 degrees with an 11 mph wind chill on Dec. 21.

Day said his team will prepare for the cold weather by continuing to practice outdoors at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, a luxury that the Volunteers do not have in Knoxville, Tenn., where temperatures will fail to reach a high that falls below 42 degrees in the days leading up to the contest.

“Having a night game in the Horseshoe – who knows the weather will be — it’ll be great. It’ll be electric. And we’re all excited about it,” Day said. “We have to go. We’ll practice outside like we continue to do to make sure that we are ready for the elements, because this time of the year that becomes a big part of it.

This weather factor, among other things, has allowed the Buckeyes to be viewed as early 7 ½-point favorites over the Volunteers per Fan Duel. A win over Tennessee would set up a rematch with No. 1 overall seed Oregon at the Rose Bowl on New Years’ Day in the CFP quarterfinals, but Day is certainly not looking ahead to the future.

Tennessee is at the forefront of the Buckeyes’ minds, and it will continue to be leading up to kickoff on Dec. 21.

“We’re not there, at all,” Day said when asked about potential matchups down the road. “We have to win this first game. We have to win this first game, and then build from there. I don’t think there’s one person in this building that’s looking way down the road — other than the fact that when they look at who we may play down the road, we played some of these guys already, so I think there’s a bunch of confidence in the fact that we know what these guys are. We played them, and we feel good about a rematch down the road or playing them this season.

“That being said, though, you have to win this game. And I’ve already talked to our guys about that last week. When you’re in this style of play, you have to get that first win. You have to get started and build some momentum into the playoffs. So that’ll be our focus and making sure we win this game.”