

Ryan Day Names True Freshman Nick McLarty As Starting Punter For Season Opener



Ohio State head coach Ryan Day announced Thursday night at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center that 6-7 true freshman Nick McLarty will serve as the team's starting punter for their season opener against Akron on Aug. 31.

"Right now, Nick will be the starter," Day said during a "lightning round" session held with the media inside the practice facility. "That competition could go into next week, but as we head into the weekend, he is the starter, and the plan is for him to be the first punter to go out in the game against Akron."

McLarty, a native of Melbourne, Australia, has made waves in Columbus since joining the program this summer, often impressing onlookers at fall camp practices with his strong leg and booming kicks. McLarty, who is a product of the Caulfield Grammar & Punt Factory in Australia, showed off those skills even before he got to Ohio State, booting a punt 90 yards over a stadium last year in a video that went viral on Twitter.

While the 255-pound McLarty has an obviously strong leg, he has shown a tendency to be inconsistent with his kicks, most notably early on in fall camp when he shanked a few punts in a practice available open to the media. But Day said his Aussie freshman has been more consistent as fall camp progressed, which, along with his ability to quickly transition to the game of American football, among other things, put him over the competition for the top spot to open the season.

"He's made a good transition into the country but also playing football, not Australian rules football, which is very, very different," Day said. "The snap-to-kick has improved. He's a taller guy, so the ball has to get off his foot faster. I think he's done that. His hang time is good. He's been more consistent."

"He'll kick a few that go out of the stadium. He's got a strong leg. But we're looking for that consistency. He's shown that here most recently, so he's got the upper hand right now."

McLarty will handle punt duties over fellow Australian Joe McGuire, who is entering his second season with the program, and Buffalo transfer Anthony Venneri, who joined the Buckeyes for his junior season after setting the Bulls' program-record for average yards per punt in consecutive seasons.

McGuire and Venneri will still have the chance to earn the starting job this season, according to Day.