

Three Questions Asked: Ohio State-Notre Dame



The bright light of the college football season has illuminated the darkness of the offseason, and No. 2 Ohio State's season is set to kick off against No. 5 Notre Dame on Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

The Buckeyes are viewed as heavy favorites - by as many as 17.5 points, depending on where you look - but there's no reason to think that the top-five ranked Irish can't give Ohio State a good battle at Ohio Stadium in one of the season's premier non-conference games.

Here are some key questions that could determine whether or not the Buckeyes will come away with a victory in the first week of the season.

1. Can Ohio State's defense stop Michael Mayer?

Defending tight ends has not been a particularly easy endeavor for Ohio State over the last few seasons, and while there's confidence that the new defense can help solve these issues, it will be a challenging first test against Notre Dame's Michael Mayer, one of the top tight ends in the nation.

Mayer finished with 71 receptions, 840 yards and seven touchdowns last season, Notre Dame's leading receiver, and is likely to repeat as the top pass-catcher for the Irish this year. The 6-5, 265-pound junior - a former five-star recruit who was offered by Ohio State - could have a day if the Buckeyes continue struggling to defend the middle of the field.

Ohio State will have Tommy Eichenberg and Steele Chambers at linebacker, and with three safeties on the field to provide an assist, the Buckeyes could have a chance to keep Mayer at bay. If they can't, though? Mayer could be looking at a 10-catch, 100-yard plus day for Notre Dame.

2. How will Paris Johnson and Dawand Jones handle Notre Dame defensive end Isaiah Foskey?

If Notre Dame wants a chance at beating Ohio State on Saturday, it will depend on whether or not the Irish can get some pressure on Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud. Jones and Johnson have the potential to be one of the best tackle duos by the end of the season - both are projected as first-round picks in next year's NFL Draft - but this will be the first collegiate start for Johnson at tackle.

All while Johnson will try to slide back into his natural position, he'll go up against one of the top defensive ends in college football in Isaiah Foskey, who Day called a future first-round pick earlier this week. Foskey finished last season with a team-high 10 sacks last season for the Irish and could be in line to dominate again this year.

Jones started all last season for Ohio State at right tackle and will do so again this season, but he struggled at points against top-end pass rushers, especially against Michigan - though few did well in that game - and he could be in for a challenge against Foskey.

3. How will Notre Dame quarterback Tyler Buchner fare in his debut?

Few environments seem more daunting for a collegiate debut than Ohio Stadium, but that's the situation that Notre Dame quarterback Tyler Buchner finds himself in. The sophomore won the starting job over now-backup Drew Pyne, and Buchner's first snap as the starter for the Irish will come in a raucous atmosphere on Saturday.

Buchner had limited experience last season, completing just 21 of his 35 passing attempts for 298 yards, though he was a rushing threat for the Irish, gaining 336 yards on 46 carries. Ohio State will be eager to make an example of Buchner in the opener, but the new starter for the Irish is feeling confident.

"My personal confidence is high, and I'd like to think it doesn't waver," he said this week. "I like to have the idea that my confidence stays the same no matter the factors. I try to keep it level at all times, and I feel like I'm in a good spot."