

Three Questions Asked: Rutgers



Ohio State kicked off conference play with a runaway 52-21 win over Wisconsin at Ohio Stadium last week. The Buckeyes will look to build off of the momentum from that win when Rutgers comes to Columbus on Saturday. The Scarlet Knights, under the tutelage of head coach Greg Schiano, enter the contest at 3-1 with wins off of Boston College, Wagner and Temple, before collecting their first loss of the season to Iowa last week.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking a look at the three biggest questions facing Ohio State as the Buckeyes get set to take the field on Saturday.

1. CAN OHIO STATE CRACK RUTGERS' RUN DEFENSE?

The Ohio State running game has gotten off to a tremendous start to the 2021-22 season, averaging 219.8 yards per game — which ranks third in the Big Ten. However, the Buckeyes could face their toughest challenge yet in that department on Saturday as Rutgers' run defense sits at the top of the conference while allowing just 56.5 yards per game.

The Rutgers defense is in a similar spot to the Buckeyes' talented backfield of TreVeyon Henderson and Miyon Williams, though, as it did not face a rushing attack of Ohio State's caliber through its first four games. None of the four teams that Rutgers has played thus far rank inside of the top 100 in terms of rushing yards per game, as Boston College (59.8) sits at No. 128, Temple (91.8) at No. 121 and Iowa (101.5) at No. 116.

Saturday's contest will certainly be a measuring stick on the legitimacy of both Ohio State's rushing attack and Rutgers' run defense.

2. CAN OHIO STATE KEEP ITS TAKEAWAY STREAK GOING?

After Ohio State was held without a takeaway in its first two games to start the season, the Buckeyes have tallied at least one in each of their last two meetings.

The Buckeyes forced Toledo quarterback Dequan Finn into an interception early in the second half of

their 77-21 blowout of the Rockets and followed that up with a fumble recovery during the waning moments of that game. Ohio State added an interception of Wisconsin quarterback Graham Mertz on his first pass attempt the following week, with safety Tanner McCalister the beneficiary of some miscommunication between Mertz and his receiver.

While the Buckeyes got off to a slow start in that department, it will be interesting to see if they can extend their takeaway streak to three games.

3. WILL INJURIES CONTINUE TO BE A FACTOR FOR THE BUCKEYES?

Ohio State has been plagued by the injury bug early this season.

Most notably, the Buckeyes were without star wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba against the Badgers last week and his status remained up in the air all week. Smith-Njigba's presence on the field has been inconsistent since he sustained a lower-body injury against Notre Dame, as he missed the Buckeyes' Week Two game against Arkansas State before playing against Toledo the following week.

Flip over to the defensive side of the football and it is a much more dire injury situation, particularly in the secondary. Ohio State was without its top three cornerbacks last week as Denzel Burke, Cameron Brown and Jordan Hancock all did not play against the Badgers due to injury, forcing the Buckeyes to turn to the young duo of first-year Jyaire Brown and second-year JK Johnson. Johnson noted on Wednesday that he's still getting reps with the first-team defense in practice, but added that he was unsure of whether he would be starting or not against the Scarlet Knights.

Saturday's availability report will be a telling sign of where the health of this team is at entering the stretch run of Big Ten play.