

Will Howard Adjusts To Added Responsibility As Ohio State's Starting Quarterback



As former Kansas State transfer and current starting quarterback Will Howard summed up during his press conference on Tuesday, the difference between Manhattan, Kan., and Columbus, Ohio, is difficult to overlook. This difference was perfectly encapsulated by the spring game for Howard.

“When I went out there for the spring game and there were (80,000 people), I was like, ‘At Kansas State, we didn’t even have a spring game,’” Howard said. “(80,000) at a glorified scrimmage is pretty crazy.”

It wasn’t just a change in scale that needed getting used to for Howard, but more importantly a new offense and coaching staff.

Howard’s growing pains in the new offense were fairly noticeable to the general public as Howard struggled with some inaccuracies in the spring, but the fifth-year quarterback continued to work throughout the offseason. When fall training camp came around Howard stepped up on the field, grading out much better than his fellow quarterbacks according to head coach Ryan Day, and he became a stronger voice in the locker room.

Howard’s swift improvements, both mentally and physically, allowed Day to name Howard the starting quarterback as early as he had done since taking over as the head coach in 2019.

Although the starting spot was something Howard always had on his mind upon entering Columbus, he was still ecstatic when he heard the news.

“When he told us, I was very excited. It’s an honor, it’s a privilege and I don’t take it lightly,” Howard said. “There’s a lot of really good players in that room so to be named starter in a group like we have is an honor and it truly is special to me.”

Despite the justified excitement from Howard in being named the team's starting quarterback, he understands the added responsibility that comes with the job.

"I know there's a lot of stuff that comes with (being named the starter)," Howard said. "I know there's a lot of expectations and pressure."

Part of the expectations or responsibility for Howard comes from his own coaching staff, which expects Howard to be a sort of run-game coordinator.

"(The coaches) say that all the time, 'What's your job in the run game? You're the run-game coordinator,'" Howard said. "It's my job to say we have a good play call or we have a pressure coming from the field, we don't have to run this play into it. It's my job to get us in and out of it. Obviously, the coaches can only do so much, but we're the ones that are out there actually calling shots."

Howard isn't the only one adjusting to the helmet communication. He's joined by every college quarterback and their play-caller in that battle, but it's still something he and the Buckeyes have had to work on. Still, Howard views helmet communication as an opportunity to help the offense.

"It took a little getting used to, we had to work through some kinks," Howard said. "Some days it's really loud and staticky, some days it's perfect... I think there's a lot of really cool things you can use it for. If you're breaking the huddle early you have until 15 seconds, (offensive coordinator Chip Kelly) can give you little reminders here and there."

Ohio State's elite receiver room, coming from one perhaps not as well-known to generate a plethora of future draft picks like Kansas State, should be an easy thing to transition towards for Howard on paper. But like any other change he's made, that comes with an added responsibility and faith in his playmakers as a quarterback.

"Here it's a little different in the way that Coach Day and Coach Kelly teach some things," Howard said. "'Hey, that guy's wide open.... He may have a guy right on him, but he's wide open. In the NFL, he's wide open.' And that's the mindset that I've had to kind of develop a little more."

"With the guys that we have here, they make plays like I've never seen anyone make plays before."

With as much of the offense's success predicated on Howard's level of play, the coaching staff understands the importance of his influence on the offense, putting Howard in a position to pick and choose certain plays and concepts to run in games.

"When you're given (the starting position) you're able to have a little more say in things," Howard said. "When you're competing for a job, you may not be as eager to say, 'Hey I don't really like that concept coach,' but when you're the starter they're telling you, 'Hey we want to hear your input. If you don't like a play we're not going to run it.'"

Considering the significant change that Howard has undergone since entering Columbus, the offseason may have felt just short of an eternity for the fifth year. Still, even with everything to prepare for and all of the responsibility, Howard is as excited to step on the field to see the Buckeye faithful as they are to see him.

"I'm really excited just to experience all of it, we've walked through what it's going to be like on a game

day but just getting out there and doing it for the first time," Howard said. "The thing I'm most excited for is running out in front of 100,000+ at the Shoe and just taking that in."