

Will Howard Looking Forward To Second Chance Against Oregon



The indelible image coming out of Ohio State's 32-31 loss to Oregon on Oct. 12 was that of a dejected Will Howard sitting on the Ducks' turf with his hands on his helmet, looking in disbelief after he slid down with zeros left on the clock, a key mistake that cost the Buckeyes a chance at a game-winning field goal.

It's an image that still haunts the fifth-year Buckeyes' quarterback over two months later.

"The way that last one ended doesn't sit right with me, it still doesn't," the often-honest Howard said after the team's 42-17 first-round College Football Playoff win Saturday night. "(It) still bugs me."

Luckily for Howard, he will get another chance to forever wipe that picture from his mind and replace it with a much more positive one when the Buckeyes take the field again against the now top-ranked Ducks on New Year's Day, this one coming at the Rose Bowl with a trip to the CFP semifinals on the line.

Shortly after playing perhaps the best game of his Ohio State career in his most important one so far, completing 24 of his 29 passes for 311 yards and two touchdowns in the win against Tennessee — the seventh game this season where he completed more than 80.0 percent of his passes — Howard didn't waste much time to express his excitement for taking on the Ducks once again.

"I'm excited. It's going to be a heck of an opportunity for all of us," he said. "I think we've all been looking forward to this one, and for another crack at these guys. ... I'm just thankful for the opportunity that we get another crack at them."

Despite the late blunder, Howard played one of his best games of the season the last time out against Oregon, showing he was capable of excelling for the Buckeyes in a high-pressure and high-stakes game by completing 28 of his 35 pass attempts (80.0 percent) for 326 passing yards and two touchdowns.

That game served as a bit of a coming out party for the veteran quarterback, where he was able to put his skills on display in front of a nationally televised audience, traits of which his offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach thinks he has only sharpened since that outing.

Chip Kelly was quick to compliment Howard after the Tennessee game, saying he has mastered the art of playing the quarterback position at an elite level both pre -and-post snap.

“We have a communication system that is kind of unique, but we’re always talking through the headset, and he’ll hand signal and say, ‘Got it.’ I will start to say, ‘No check it to the — and he knows. He got it. So I think it just tells where he is and how dialed in Will has been throughout the entire season.”

“I think he understands the fundamentals of the position, but also the game within the game, and taking what the defense gives him and making those decisions of when to take a check down and not to force a play.”

Despite all of these successes with the Scarlet and Gray, Howard’s 2024 season is still largely defined by his late-game blunder against Oregon and his lackluster performance in Ohio State’s 13-10 loss to Michigan. Howard has the opportunity to erase each of those negative moments and exit the field on a more positive note against the Ducks at the Rose Bowl, however, a unique second chance that he is certainly not going to take for granted.

“I said this before the game, in life you don’t get a lot of second chances, so the fact that we’re getting a second chance here is a blessing from from the Lord,” Howard said. “We’re going to go out there and have some fun and let it rip because this is all we have. It’s win or go home.”