

Work Ethic Drives Motivated Ohio State Running Back Room



Ohio State faced a running back crisis in the spring following the departure of J.K. Dobbins for the NFL and a serious injury to presumed starter Master Teague.

The only Buckeye backs remaining were redshirt freshman Steele Chambers and sophomore Marcus Crowley, who had suffered a season-ending injury against Maryland Nov. 9. Cincinnati three-star tailback Miyan Williams did not enroll until June, and fifth-year senior Demario McCall split time in the slot in 2019.

Head coach Ryan Day and running backs coach Tony Alford turned to the transfer portal and brought in the best back available in Oklahoma senior Trey Sermon. During an unusual offseason, the two-time honorable mention All-Big 12 has made quite the impression on his new team.

“Trey’s been a great addition so far,” Day said. “He’s got a great way about him. He’s got a great work ethic, and our guys have kind of embraced him. When you bring in a fifth-year senior like that or somebody who’s a transfer in one of those settings, you have to find the right guy. I mean, Jonah Jackson was that right guy and we think Trey Sermon’s the same way.”

While Sermon is expected to play an important role in replacing Dobbins, who rushed for an Ohio State record 2,003 yards last season, Teague will also be pivotal to the Buckeyes’ success alongside quarterback Justin Fields.

Although serving as Dobbins’ backup a year ago, Teague still ranked seventh in the Big Ten with 789 rushing yards as a redshirt freshman. The talented tailback from Murfreesboro, Tenn., reportedly suffered an Achilles injury in the spring, but his quick recovery has pleasantly surprised Day, especially considering the conditions amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I will say that Master has done an unbelievable job of rehabbing,” Day said of the third-year sophomore running back. “He has been focused on it. He has been disciplined. He amazes me every day with what he’s done to get to even where he’s at right now. Very, very impressed with what he’s done.

“And again, it wasn’t easy because he was on his own a lot. But with (physical therapist) Adam Stewart and (athletic trainer) Shaun Barnhouse and our staff, and then his work ethic has been just

tremendous.”

Beyond Sermon and Teague, the three remaining scholarship backs, Chambers, Crowley and Williams, will compete for depth roles. Chambers carried 19 times for 135 yards and one touchdown in 2019, but the Roswell, Ga., native still took a redshirt.

Crowley ran for 247 yards and one score on 25 carries, while adding a seven-yard reception he took for a touchdown before ending his freshman campaign early with a leg injury. He is expected to be the top challenger to Sermon and Teague for touches.

Fitting into his own box, the versatile McCall gained 122 rushing yards and scored twice on 18 carries, while adding four receptions for 28 yards in the passing game. Each preseason, the North Ridgeville, Ohio native garners hype for his playmaking ability, and this is his final year to showcase his talents.

The other new face besides Sermon, Williams, transformed his body in the offseason by dropping body fat and looks the part of a Buckeye back. Williams will find himself buried on the depth chart to start, but he can benefit from the great group of ball carriers ahead of him.

“Steele Chambers had an unbelievable offseason. I think you’re going to see great things out of him,” Day said. “Marcus Crowley’s coming off of his injury. He’s done a good job. And then Miyan Williams has stepped in in short time and shown that he can learn quickly. And he’s gotten himself in great shape, too.”

It remains to be seen how Sermon and Teague will balance the workload and which reserves will earn the most reps, but the Buckeyes are in much better shape than they were in the spring.

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