

100 Percent Healthy, Matthew Baldwin Builds Confidence As OSU QB Battle Begins



Thirteen months and counting into his Ohio State career, redshirt freshman quarterback Matthew Baldwin has been through quite the whirlwind since he arrived in Columbus.

As he prepares for spring camp the week of March 4, Baldwin's process is a polar opposite from his first time around during early enrollment in 2018.

When he joined the Buckeyes last January, Baldwin underwent ACL surgery on his right knee after a tear suffered in December 2017 while leading Austin (Texas) Lake Travis to a 13-3 overall record and the Class 6A Division I state championship game.

"This past year has gone by so fast," Baldwin told BSB in December. "It's because I was playing in that semifinal game, had the ACL stuff and then can't play in the state championship. I come to Ohio State and I'm up in Ohio, it's 10 degrees, kind of wanting to be back home. It happened so fast.

"But I developed a lot physically, mentally and emotionally this whole season. I wouldn't rather be anywhere else. I love the guys we have. I love the staff. (Strength coach) Mick (Marotti) has been so great. And (head coach Ryan) Day, obviously, he's been really supportive."

Since he flipped his commitment Dec. 7, 2017, from Colorado State to OSU after a late flurry of offers — eventually ranked as the 247Sports composite's No. 331 overall prospect, No. 12 pro-style quarterback and No. 43 player in Texas for the 2018 recruiting class — Baldwin's road back leads him into the thick of an intense competition.

Right after Urban Meyer's retirement went public Dec. 4 and Day officially went from offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach to head coach Jan. 2, Georgia transfer Justin Fields joined Ohio State two days later and received immediate eligibility Feb. 8 from the NCAA.

As the coaching staff shuffles and the position group reloads — passing game coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mike Yurcich from Oklahoma State is in, while Dwayne Haskins (2019 NFL draft) and Tate Martell (Miami [Fla.] transfer) are out — Baldwin attacks what Day described Feb. 6 as an "opportunity to go after" the starting job after he worked his way back and reached 100 percent.

"My knee is 100 percent," Baldwin said. "I'm healthy as I can be. The one thing I'm definitely working

on is confidence because when you have an injury like that, you obviously lose a little bit of ... confidence.

“When you’re planting on that (knee) — in the past, maybe I just am looking onto the next thing. But now, I’m a little (careful) on it. I’ve just got to gain that confidence back.”

Baldwin (6-3, 205) packed on 10 pounds of muscle as he took his time throughout rehabilitation, learning from Haskins and former Buckeyes quarterback/current LSU starter Joe Burrow in the position group. Both helped Baldwin along as they competed in their quarterback battle last spring, eventually leading to a historic campaign for Haskins that Baldwin studied closely.

“On the field, Dwayne has an elite level of confidence in himself,” Baldwin said. “And that’s for good reason, because he’s an elite player and he’ll take any shot he can take, and that’s something that I’ve definitely started to learn here is that you can’t take time to second guess yourself — you’ve just got to go — because if you do that, you’ll get left behind, if you’re worrying about not doing things right.”

Another bond Baldwin has built, on top of Haskins as his “big brother” at OSU, has been with fifth-year senior Chris Chugunov. The second-year graduate transfer from West Virginia, who rounds out Ohio State’s three scholarships on the roster after sophomore walk-on Danny Vanatsky, added to Baldwin’s insight gained throughout the 2018 season.

“It’s serious when we need to be and fun when we need to relax a little bit,” Baldwin said. “So we’ve got Chris Chugunov ... him and I have been really close. We’ve been roommates in the hotels (on road trips), so naturally we’re going to bond a little bit more there with him — not to take anything away from anyone else — but yeah, him and I have become really good friends.

“So that’s kind of like my big brother. We have the ‘big brother’ system where Dwayne’s my actual big brother and he’s taught me so much, but Chugs is also taken me under his wing because he’s been in the game for so long.”

With fellow recruits from his freshman class and underclassmen on the Buckeyes’ roster, Baldwin worked throughout the fall every Sunday when he had the chance to get more practice reps in. As he stayed fresh, Baldwin put pieces together under Day.

“He’s been great,” Baldwin said. “An incredible coach, incredible guy. He teaches us. He’s so meticulous about what he does on the field that when it’s time to teach us on lessons about life, he’s someone we can look up to, so I’m very thankful for him.”

While the climb is steep with Fields cleared for play in 2019, Baldwin brings a burst of energy as he makes his return to the practices fields at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center three weeks from now.

“I’m looking forward to competing for the job,” Baldwin said. “It’s just whatever I can do to help the team win. That’s really the goal of me and ... whoever it is (winning the job). But as far as everything that comes with it, we try to stay focused on what our team is thinking, what our coaches are thinking.”

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