

Buckeyes See Dual-Threat QB Justin Fields Settle In During Ohio State Spring Game



Ohio State's "thud" structure of Saturday's spring game made some evaluations difficult to measure, but Justin Fields provided the 61,102 fans in attendance at Ohio Stadium with flashes throughout the annual scrimmage's first three quarters.

Upon settling in, the sophomore quarterback showed out with his arm before the end of the second quarter when he fired deep down the right sideline and found senior wide receiver Binjimen Victor for a 98-yard touchdown.

Midway through the third quarter, though, Fields ripped off a 30-yard run down the left sideline and across midfield — deep into opposing territory.

The long gain — a read-option keep left, while redshirt freshman running back Master Teague plunged up the middle, where Fields beat redshirt freshman linebacker Trayvon Wilburn to the perimeter before he surged his way downfield and weaved into the red zone — caught the defense off guard after an afternoon of drop-back passes and designed tailback runs lulled the unit to sleep.

On the opposite end of the field at defensive end, sophomore Tyreke Smith saw the play develop figured Fields was gone.

"You've got to just respect his running ability," Smith said of Fields after the Buckeyes completed spring camp with the Gray's 35-17 win over the Scarlet. "He's definitely an athletic quarterback, so we've got to scheme for that."

While head coach Ryan Day rightfully expects the competition between Fields and redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin to continue into fall camp, some skill-set separation stems from the Georgia transfer's dual-threat ability.

Neither signal caller was consistent through the air — Fields completed 4 of 13 passes (30.8 percent) for 131 yards and a touchdown with the first-team offense while Baldwin went 20 of 36 (55.6 percent) for 246 yards and two touchdowns to two interceptions with the first- and second-team units.

On the ground, though, Fields found an edge with eight rushes for 38 yards (4.75 average) and a long of 30 from the read-option keep midway through the third quarter.

"I'm very comfortable in that setting, just the read-option stuff," Fields said. "I think it's going to be a big part of this (offense), this upcoming year. So I feel very comfortable in that and I've been doing it since high school. So I think that can be a big part of this."

Four sacks dropped Fields by 14 yards, originally gaining 52 — 6.5 per carry — on the ground.

Baldwin took two sacks, attempting four rushes and registering six yards (1.5 average) with a long of six on a scramble down the right sideline late in the second quarter.

The potential return of the quarterback run brings a unique element back to OSU's offense after 2018 starter Dwayne Haskins sat back in the pocket and threw the ball all over the field, rushing 79 times for 108 yards (1.4 per carry) and four touchdowns.

"We've got a lot of plays where we have to know if he's going to pull it or he may have a chance to run it, so we already know we've got to learn to turn, put our feet in the ground and run," Smith said of Fields. "(Defensive line coach Larry Johnson) has just been teaching us that, just to get used to a running quarterback."

Through 15 practices, fifth-year senior H-back K.J. Hill has seen Fields find his comfort level in Day's offense.

Hill, who recorded two receptions for 43 yards (21.5 average) with a long of 33, watched Fields man the first-team unit from passing concepts to quarterback run with confidence — the same way he did throughout March and April.

"I think (Fields) was a little nervous, coming out in the spring game — I asked him and he was like, 'Nah,' but I know he was" Hill said. "I feel like he got comfortable after he made a throw — actually, after the first series, he got comfortable. He started stepping up in the pocket, going through his reads, looking like (how he does) in practices."

Fields came to Columbus from Athens, Ga., as a former five-star recruit — the 247Sports composite's No. 2 overall prospect, No. 1 dual-threat quarterback and No. 2 player in Georgia (behind only Clemson's Trevor Lawrence) for 2018 — for a reason.

But before the battle with Baldwin resumes in August, Fields has work to do — from the field to the film and weight rooms — as he approaches his second round of offseason workouts under strength coach Mickey Marotti.

"I'm not sure about what any stars or anything, but I know he is a great quarterback and even better teammate," said fifth-year senior H-back C.J. Saunders. "I'm thankful that he is at this program and I'm thankful that we're just building and going to carry into the fall."

"It really starts in winter workouts and what we did (Jan. 17-March 2). We had mat drills with Coach Mick and there was just moments where you either embrace what's going on at Ohio State and the toughness or you're going to tap your head and wait for another day to try to be great."

"(Fields) really found out in the winter and really grew with the team, and everyone here took him in as family and that's what it's all about."

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