

B1G Coaches Teleconference: Ryan Day, Chris Ash Preview Ohio State-Rutgers



As both Ohio State and Rutgers progress through the week before their conference opener Saturday, a 3:30 p.m. kickoff at Ohio Stadium to be televised on Big Ten Network, Buckeyes acting head coach Ryan Day and Scarlet Knights head coach Chris Ash previewed the matchup for each squad Tuesday on the Big Ten coaches teleconference.

Ryan Day

- After head coach Urban Meyer returned Monday to Ohio State at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and met with the staff, Day said the Buckeyes entered Tuesday “knee-deep” into game preparations for Rutgers. As the Scarlet Knights come off their 35-7 win over Texas State, Day said Ohio State has to be ready for “a veteran defense” after Rutgers’ back end “had a good start” to its season with an interception and 100 yards allowed on 10-of-25 passing against the Bobcats.
- Ohio State defensive coordinator Greg Schiano mentioned Monday that he might have to change the on-field calls due to how long Rutgers offensive coordinator John McNulty has been around him, but Day downplayed the past relationship’s ultimate relevance to what happens in the game.
 - “At the end of the day, you’ve got to put your players in positions to make plays and it can be as well,” Day said. “The players are the ones that need to play. So it’s very common for guys to be familiar with each other and play, go against each other several times. But both guys are similar in experiences with multiple approaches, so I don’t think it’s anything out of the ordinary.”
- After the offensive line debuted with veteran players in new positions, Day said the two-deep unit was “solid” in Ohio State’s 77-31 win over Oregon State.
 - “I think that we were able to play a lot of guys,” Day said. “It was a hot day. There was a point there where we platooned the second line in there, a lot of different guys played. But I thought that, overall, the tempo was very well. They kept pushing throughout it and lengthened the drives. They did a nice job with moving, so it was a good start for them as well.”
- Sophomore quarterback Dwayne Haskins had zero designed runs as the Buckeyes totaled 721 yards against the Beavers, while junior Mike Weber and sophomore J.K. Dobbins dashed for a combined 260 yards on 35 carries. Haskins tucked and ran twice for 24 yards. Day, however, said Haskins is capable of runs if need be.

- “Dwayne can run,” Day said. “It’s just ... whatever the defense is presenting, there’s times where the decision is to hand the ball off. You didn’t see any designed quarterback runs on Saturday, but there are times where he can read somebody and pull it in a situation.”
- Asked about two-tight-end sets, Day noted how there were plays where Ohio State also worked those looks in with two-back sets to mix up looks. Day said the Buckeyes have been able to switch things up because the depth at each position is better.
 - “We’re looking at all those things,” Day said. “We had a play or two in there where we had two tight ends and two running backs in the game. So looking at some of those and figuring out what grouping gives us the best situation to be successful and try to create more conflict for the defense and more to prepare for.”

Chris Ash

- Since he took over Rutgers’ rebuild, Ash has struggled against his former program. Between back-to-back shutouts — 58-0 in 2016 and 56-0 in 2017 — Ohio State has owned the head-to-head meetings. In his third year, however, Ash said he feels better about how the Scarlet Knights can compete.
 - “I do feel like we are a much, much improved football team than we have been in the last two years,” Ash said. “I think year one was what it was, I think year two we were a lot better and I feel like we’re a lot better here in year three.”
- As the Scarlet Knights trot out Artur Sitkowski (6-5, 224) for his first career Big Ten start after he completed 20 of 30 passes for 205 yards and a touchdown to three interceptions Sept. 1 against Texas State, Ash said Rutgers would learn a lot about the freshman quarterback in their conference opener.
 - “Now we’re going to on the road and not only on the road but to one of the biggest and loudest stadiums in the country against a very talented football team. There are a lot of unknowns still about our freshman quarterback and how he can handle that environment. We’re hoping that he’ll do just fine, but it is a whole different animal.”
- Among the weapons on Rutgers’ retooled offense, Ash spoke on similarities between shifty sophomore running back Raheem Blackshear and a former Ohio State playmaker. Ash said Blackshear (5-9, 192) drew reminders of Buckeyes H-back Curtis Samuel (2014-16) as a versatile player in multiple spots on offense and special teams.
 - “Raheem’s one of our best players on our football team,” Ash said. “He’s very quick, he’s elusive, he’s good with the football. He’s a guy that could make a lot of things happen for us. Not much different ... than what like Curtis Samuel was to Ohio State’s offense there a couple years ago. He could be in the backfield, he could be at wideout, he could return a couple of punts, return kicks. That’s the type of player he is for us. We’re going to lean on him to do a lot of things for us.”
- Despite the absence of Meyer on the sideline, Ash downplayed the idea of it as an advantage to Rutgers against Ohio State.
 - “Considering he wasn’t on the sideline Saturday and they just put up 77 points, no, I don’t see that as an advantage,” Ash said. “It’s not about him being there and not being there. It’s about our players and their players going out an executing the calls that have been called and bringing them to light with their play on the field. I know, at times, they can make it look like one guy or one individual is really important, which Coach Meyer is, but it takes a

lot more than one person to have a great game plan and execute at a high level. Obviously, they were able to do that this last Saturday and I don't expect that to be any different this next Saturday."

- Rutgers heads to Ohio State after the Scarlet Knights suffered a hit to their depth at the "Jack" position, where hybrid defensive end and outside linebacker is without redshirt freshman Tijaun Mason. As the 6-5, 230-pound Mason sits out the Big Ten opener against the Buckeyes and beyond with a "long-term" leg injury, redshirt freshman Mike Tverdov (6-4, 255) becomes the next man up behind sophomore starter Elorm Lumor (6-3, 246).
 - "Right now, we have a few options," Ash said. "Mike Tverdov has been taking some reps at that position throughout training camp and (will) be the backup at that position. What we'll do is rely on one of the other guys on the interior defensive line position to take up Mike's backup (defensive tackle) position. At our defensive end position, that would play to the field. So Mike Tverdov's been a swing guy for us and he'll fit that role here with Tijaun Mason out."

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