

# Buckeyes Secondary Passed First Test, But A Bigger One Is On The Horizon



After two weeks of playing against weaker offenses, Ohio State's defense had its first real test against the pass-heavy Western Kentucky offense and its quarterback Austin Reed, who led the nation in the 2022 season with 4,744 passing yards.

Cornerback Denzel Burke said they were very happy with their performance, but there are still issues they could fix going into No. 9 Notre Dame week. The secondary combined for six broken up passes, three forced fumbles – two of which the Buckeyes recovered – and two interceptions, with one returned for a score.

After a beginning of the game that featured a Jordan Hancock pass interference, immediately followed by him getting crossed up in coverage for a 34-yard gain caught by Hilltoppers wide receiver Malachi Corley. That drive ultimately ended in a touchdown that brought the game within four points.

OSU wouldn't give up another point the rest of the day, and Hancock would recover from that series, forcing a fumble later and breaking up a pass with five tackles to add to the stat sheet.

"It was a good game. I feel like we still have a lot of stuff to clean up," Burke said. "We're trying to play at a high level, and with these games we want to be able to play at a high level so when these matchup games come, we're ready. Next week we're going to South Bend, it's a real one."

The Fighting Irish sixth-year quarterback Sam Hartman is going to be an even bigger test for the defense than Reed was. He spent the past five seasons at Wake Forest and in that time was very impressive, climbing near the top of ACC career records, and breaking one conference record with 110 touchdowns.

While guiding Notre Dame to a 4-0 start, he has thrown for 13 more along with 1,061 yards. Notre Dame head coach Marcus Freeman believes Hartman's time spent playing college football will help him

going into this top-10 matchup.

"I think about this game for Sam is that the moment won't be too big," he said "He's played a lot of football games. I don't know how many, but he's been in a lot of football games. So, I think his mind will be in a great spot. He knows he's got to go out there and execute and do his job. He won't let the things that don't matter to have success affect him."

Hartman talked Monday about the Buckeyes defense and how he is going to be approaching the game.

"Their secondary brought back a lot of guys that are all extremely talented," he said. "We know we have a challenge on our hand, and they do a lot of things up front. Going into this game , it's going to be a battle for all four quarters and they're going to bring it, and they have a lot of experience as well. So, it's an exciting challenge, but not something we're going to take lightly."

There's almost a full week between now and the Buckeyes trip to South Bend, and they will be using it well. Ryan Day said last week they had some very good practices, but they will have to carry that over into this week for their toughest challenge yet. If Hartman isn't going to be bothered by the big stage, the Buckeyes are going to need to play their best game. Hancock is looking forward to the preparation.

"I'm going to be preparing a lot just as this whole team is," Hancock said. "It's a big game, we have to go in South Bend and handle things, so we're going to do everything to prepare and hopefully come out on the good end of things."