

Day Believes Ohio State Needs To Prove Itself In 2022



Ohio State head coach Ryan Day hasn't minced his words this offseason about how important it will be for his team to establish dominance in 2022.

Last week, Day said an 11-2 season with a Rose Bowl win is suitable for most college football programs, but it's not an achievement for Ohio State. In Columbus, the expectation is for the Buckeyes to win a Big Ten Championship, reach the College Football Playoff and claim a national title. Day's squad didn't accomplish any of those feats in 2021.

Still, its victory in Pasadena, Calif., over Utah caused many to generate excitement about the Buckeyes' potential the next time it took the field, namely the offense that exploded for Rose Bowl records behind quarterback C.J. Stroud and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba. That New Year's Day game was a culmination for a top-ranked Ohio State offense last season. The Buckeyes had the best total offense (561.5 ypg) and scoring offense (45.7 ppg), the second-best passing efficiency and the third-best passing offense (380.9 ypg).

However, Day believes those numbers have no bearings on the 2022 team and thinks the next iteration of his program must establish a new identity this fall.

"Our offense hasn't done anything," Day said. "This is a whole new group, and we have to go out and prove ourselves. I know you can think, 'Well, this offense is going to go out there and start scoring and be the best offense in the conference.' But that doesn't just happen. We have to start with a foundation. That's running the football and toughness, setting the edge, ball security, and all the little things that lead you there."

Despite Day's concerns that the offense needs to prove itself, the team's returning starters offer confidence that Ohio State could reclaim its title as the best offense in college football. After all, the Buckeyes have a Heisman Trophy front runner in Stroud, a Doak Walker Award contender in TreVeyon Henderson and a Biletnikoff Award favorite in Smith-Njigba back for this season.

Ohio State's question marks for 2022 exist more on the defensive side of the ball, where first-year defensive coordinator Jim Knowles and his new-look defense will be on display for the first time. Still, Day set high expectations for the Silver Bullets at Big Ten Media Days, and he doubled down on that

statement Thursday.

“We want to be the best in the country at what we do, and we should be held accountable for that,” Day said. “That’s the goal, and we’re working to make sure it happens. If we have a top 10 offense, a top 10 defense and a top 10 special teams, that will give us a chance to reach our goals.”

Day believes Ohio State should rank that high in each category every season. The offense looks well on its way to meeting that goal, but what about the defense? Since hiring Knowles, safeties coach Perry Eliano and cornerbacks coach Tim Walton and retaining defensive line coach Larry Johnson, he’s offered consistent praise to the coaching staff, and he thinks they will meet the lofty standard he set after a disappointing defensive season for the Buckeyes in 2021.

“I like the scheme,” Day said. “I like what Jim’s doing. I like what our defensive staff is doing. I think Tim and Perry and Larry do a great job. They teach effort. They teach fundamentals. I like what’s going on there, but the proof will be in the pudding. We play on September 3, but certainly, there’s a lot of optimism.”

Toughness, discipline and skill will help Ohio State achieve success. Combine that with the urgency Day feels before the season opener against Notre Dame — something he said the other coaches and his players feel with him — the Buckeyes are moving quickly to ready themselves for the marquee matchup.

“They’ve been in big games,” Day said of his players. “They’ve got scars. They’ve got stars on their chest for winning games, but they’ve also got some calluses. I think that makes it good. There’s some experience there. Everyone’s going to be juiced up for that game, but it’s certainly not going to overwhelm anybody.

“We’ve been there before. We’ve been in the bright lights. We know what that’s like. But we know how important it is to go win that game, and it certainly is on the back of everybody’s mind here at camp.”