

Day Calls Notre Dame A ‘Big Challenge’ For Ohio State In Home Opener



Since Ryan Day became head coach at Ohio State in 2019, he’s reminded himself frequently that the expectation is perfection. His teams can’t play poorly or lose games because that’s not the standard in Columbus.

It’s an Ohio State fan’s prerogative. For decades, the Buckeyes have been the team of record in college football and a model of consistency that all other programs look to follow.

Day is acutely aware of this unique burden entering his fourth season. On Wednesday, Day joined Brandon Beam and former Ohio State linebacker Bobby Carpenter on 97.1 The Fan. Among other topics, they discussed where the Buckeyes landed in way-too-early top 25 polls and how the team will prepare for its highly-anticipated matchup with Notre Dame on Sept. 3.

According to ESPN, Fox Sports and The Athletic, Ohio State is the second-best team in the FBS behind Alabama in summer polls. OSU sits in front of Georgia, Clemson, Notre Dame, Texas, Michigan and others.

Day said he and his coaching staff look at the early polls, but they don’t put too much weight into them. He wants his team to keep an underdog mentality to remain focused and keep a week-to-week approach during the 12-game season.

“You look at them, but the last thing we want to see is ourselves on the top of anything (in the preseason) because you have to come in and want to prove yourself every day,” Day said. “We don’t have the ability to trip up at all. We have to start right from the get-go, build as the season goes on, and then play our best football at the end of the season.”

Ohio State’s first regular-season contest will be against Notre Dame in Ohio Stadium on Sept. 3. First-year head coach Marcus Freeman is familiar with the Buckeyes, having played linebacker for the program in the mid-2000s and later becoming a graduate assistant under then-defensive coordinator Luke Fickell in the 2010s. The Irish rank in the top five in several way-too-early top 25 polls.

Day understands Notre Dame’s strength and claims the Ohio State coaching staff has been preparing for this matchup since the Buckeyes flew home from Pasadena, Calif., after the team’s Rose Bowl win over Utah.

"At Ohio State, we have to win every game," Day said. "You can't all of a sudden put so much into one game and then lay an egg the next week. We're talking about a top-10 matchup, a night game at home. It's going to be an unbelievable atmosphere, a lot of emotion. We're going to be all over this."

The last time Ohio State hosted a top 10 opponent at night was also its home opener in 2017, when the Buckeyes faced eventual Heisman Trophy winner Baker Mayfield and Oklahoma. Fans may recall Mayfield running to midfield and planting an OU flag in the Block "O" after the Sooners beat the Buckeyes, 31-16.

Three seasons before that, Ohio State lost its home opener under the lights to Virginia Tech on Sept. 6, 2014. Then-quarterback J.T. Barrett went 9-for-29 passing for 219 yards with one touchdown and three interceptions as the Buckeyes fell to the Hokies, 35-21.

This year, Ohio State will face a formidable foe in a night-game home opener. Freeman's team will be loaded on defense, where returning defensive end Isaiah Foskey, linebackers JD Bertrand and Marist Liufau will accompany former All-American safety Brandon Joseph, who transferred from Northwestern in the off-season.

The Buckeyes a first-year defensive coordinator Jim Knowles will be challenged by Notre Dame quarterback Tyler Buchner. He will call plays behind future NFL tackles Joe Alt and Blake Fisher and have weapons like tight end Michael Mayer and wide receiver Braden Lenzy on the outside.

"It's a very good team, a great program. They have a very good coaching staff," Day said. "They'll be a big challenge, so we're going to work all summer to make sure we're prepared to play our best football in that game."

Ohio State and Notre Dame will kick off at 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 3, with ESPN's College GameDay in attendance. Quarterback C.J. Stroud and wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba will make their first appearances since their record-breaking performances in the Rose Bowl. Defensive end Zach Harrison and safety Ronnie Hickman Jr. will lead a new-look Buckeye defense into the Horseshoe to face the Irish in primetime.