

Denzel Burke, Ohio State Embracing “Villain” Mentality Heading Into The Game



Michigan has been on the front lines of national criticism over the last month as more details have come out about the team’s sign-stealing scandal, but when Ohio State enters Michigan Stadium on Saturday for a noon kickoff to close out the regular season, it’s the Buckeyes will will have a target on their backs.

Ohio State will enter its most hostile environment of the season, looking to knock off undefeated Michigan and end a two-game winning streak for the Wolverines. While the Buckeyes will enter as the antagonists coming into Ann Arbor, that’s a role the team is relishing in.

“We’ve just got to go out there and do our job and really compete play hard for each other,” junior cornerback Denzel Burke said on Tuesday. “We’re going to be the villain walking in there. This game is really just about respect for us. Especially my class, the last two years, we haven’t got it done. No gold pants. We’ve just got to go out there and just be us.”

And what’s a villain without a tragic backstory? Burke and the rest of Ohio State’s defense have had nothing but time to reflect on shortcomings against the Wolverines in each of the last two seasons, as Michigan has put up a combined 87 points and 1,017 yards of offense in the Buckeyes’ last two losses.

It’s been a long road back getting a chance for revenge against the Wolverines, but it’s an opportunity that the team feels prepared for heading into Saturday.

“It’s horrible,” Burke said. “Because especially when you’re at Ohio State, livelihoods are at stake. You’ve got to win this game. It’s mandatory. We had to live with it 365 days and now it’s here, so we’re ready.”

This is potentially the last chance that Burke – as well as a handful of other upperclassmen, including wide receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka, defensive ends J.T. Tuimoloau and Jack Sawyer,

and linebackers Tommy Eichenberg and Cody Simon, among others - will have to play against Michigan, and he said that he's felt very emotional in the build up to this game.

"I'm trying not to get out of character, but this game means a lot for us, and we're going to get it done for the state of Ohio," he said. "I'm not just doing it for myself. I'm doing it for my teammates. I'm doing it for my head coach. I'm doing it for our coaches and I'm doing it for the state of Ohio, and we don't want to let them down."