

Gene Smith Turned Page to Helping Defense After Loss To Michigan



In the months following Ohio State's 42-27 loss to Michigan, everyone sounded off, from players, coaches (even opposing ones), fans and media alike. The one voice that had yet to speak up was Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith, who said last week that the Michigan loss was hard on everyone in the building.

"That's not one that we ever want to experience again, and it's not something that we really think should ever happen again," Smith said. "Our expectation is to win that game every year and we've done that historically.

"So, how do we respond? What I try to do as the athletic director is step back and look at the big picture, and I did that with the whole season as I considered that game," he continued. "We were young, we grew as the season went on. I really felt we grew."

It was the first loss to the Wolverines since 2011, and while a loss to Michigan is humiliating in and of itself, it was a manhandling in Ann Arbor.

A loss like that caused a fair amount of introspection among the program, which led to nearly an entire rehauling of Ohio State's defensive staff. Smith said that following the game, he was in full support of the changes Day looked to make.

"I turned the page immediately to what I needed to do to help Ryan Day do what he needed to do to fix," he said. "In this building, his mindset was fixing the defense and creating more leadership among the players, and he's done that. The question for me was about helping him. The mood in the building was felt more for me through him, and what he was trying to do."

Though it will be a few months before Ohio State's new-look defense will take the field, Smith was still pleased with the immediate response to the loss to Michigan with the Buckeyes' comeback win over Utah in the Rose Bowl.

"I love the reaction and how we responded in the Rose Bowl," Smith said. "I think that was a direct result of him trying to get more leadership from the players. Great teams have talent, they have great coaches but at the end of the day, players at some point in time have to take control, be it of the locker room or of the game if you want to be champions. And there were just so many puppies last year - one of the youngest teams in our history."