

Head Coach Ryan Day Sees Great Opportunity For Younger Players To Make A Difference In Cotton Bowl



Two years ago, Ohio State entered the 2022 Rose Bowl Game against Utah with many of that season's most impactful players sitting out for the NFL Draft, allowing then-sophomores such as wide receivers Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka to shine. The Buckeyes face a similar scenario in this season's Cotton Bowl matchup against Missouri with the standout Harrison likely sitting out and the team missing the services of now-transfers Kyle McCord, Julian Fleming, and Chip Trayanum, among others, a challenge that head coach Ryan Day said could once again serve as a great opportunity for the roster's younger players to make a statement for the future.

"We want to win the game, that's the No. 1 thing," Day said during he and Missouri head coach Eliah Drinkwitz' joint press conference on Thursday. "So we're gonna go in and do everything we possibly can to win the game, and then go from there. But there are going to be some opportunities for guys to take on new roles in this game, different than it has been during the season. So I'm excited for them.

"And we've seen that before," he continued. "You think about the Rose Bowl a couple years ago, where Marvin and (Egbuka) went into the game and did a great job that freshman year. And it really built momentum into the offseason for them. So guys are going to play, we have to win the game. That's the No. 1 thing. But at the same time (there's an) opportunity for some younger guys to get in there and build some momentum for the future."

Similarly to the 2022 Rose Bowl, Day and Ohio State will once again need to rely on a duo of freshman wide receivers to ignite the offense, that being promising first-years Brandon Inniss and Carnell Tate. The freshman tandem showed promise in limited action in the 2023 regular season, with Inniss hauling in a single catch against Purdue that went for a 58-yard touchdown, and Tate ranking fifth on the team in both catches (17) and receiving yards (260).

But Friday's matchup against the Tigers will provide the biggest opportunity for sophomore Devin Brown, who can make a case to be next season's starting quarterback with a strong overall performance. Day said the Cotton Bowl could prove to him and his staff that he deserves to be considered for the starting quarterback role in 2024, something that the coach said his signal caller is more than ready to tackle.

"I know that everybody in this game has an opportunity to build some momentum for next year, and Devin's exactly in that situation," Day said. "This is exactly what he wanted. He wanted this opportunity. And so he's taken it and ran with it the last few weeks. And I think the guys on the team feel it, they feel his presence out there.

"And so what a great opportunity for him to do that. Once the season is over, we'll kind of, you know, figure out, you know, where we're at with everything. But as of right now, he's our quarterback, and we're moving forward. And this is a great opportunity for him to go build more confidence with the guys around him as we head into next season."

Ohio State's youth may serve as an exciting opportunity for Day and his staff to evaluate their roster heading into 2024. But for Missouri and Drinkwitz, the newness and uncertainty with the Buckeyes' changing roster — especially at the quarterback position — has caused some challenges for him and the Tigers as they prepare to take on Ohio State. The Tigers coach said the implementation of Brown into Ohio State's offense could allow Day and the Buckeyes to get creative and try out some new formations, a change in their offense that could pose a wrench in Missouri's defensive gameplan.

"Understanding Coach Day's past and Coach (Brian) Hartline's past, you realize that there's such a variety of things that they'll be able to adapt and make this offense go with his skill set," Drinkwitz said. "So it'll be a challenge. We'll be reactive, we'll have to react to see what his style of game plan is....So we'll just have to figure out what style of game it becomes and then react to it. But their quarterback is very talented, he throws the ball very well, runs it very well. And you can tell that he's very good as far as leadership."