

Key Matchup: Ohio State Defense Vs. Washington's Big-Play Threat



LOS ANGELES — Throughout the season, it has been clear what the strengths are for Ohio State and Washington.

The sixth-ranked Buckeyes (12-1) have one of the best offenses in the nation, led by sophomore quarterback Dwayne Haskins, who has thrown for 4,580 yards and 47 touchdowns through the first 13 starts of his career. The No. 9 Huskies (10-3) are led by a stingy defense that allows just 15.5 points per game.

Overall, it's a strength-on-strength matchup that could come down to one or two big plays. That's where the Ohio State defense comes into play - the Buckeyes' Achilles' heel all year has been an inability to limit big plays. Those issues have surfaced week after week and nearly cost Ohio State a chance to win the Big Ten when Maryland rattled off a pair of 70-plus-yard touchdowns (the Buckeyes ended up storming back to win that game in overtime).

Against Washington, Ohio State will need to find a way to keep senior running back Myles Gaskin from breaking into open space. The back has rushed for more than 1,000 yards in each of his four seasons at Washington, and he has runs of 68 yards or more in all four seasons as well. His long this year was 80 yards, which came against Washington State in the regular-season finale.

The talent in the backfield for Washington hasn't been lost on Ohio State, according to defensive coordinator Greg Schiano.

"You know, they're really good in several different position groups," Schiano said. "I think the running back group is probably as good as we've seen."

Ohio State junior defensive tackle Dre'Mont Jones noted that Washington leans on the running back corps, and he had specific praise for Gaskin as well.

"I see a team that really relies on their running backs to get them going," Jones said. "I see No. 9 (Gaskin), he's really I guess the kick-starter for their team, seems like, my point of view, and he's really talented."

With Gaskin leading the charge, it will be up to players such as Jones - who will be suiting up for the

Buckeyes for the last time - to make sure they get him on the ground before he breaks into the second level. If Ohio State can limit the big hits, the offense has proved throughout the year than it can do more than enough to come away with the win.

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