

Knowles Looking To Defend Against Effective Penn State Rushing Attack



Throughout this season, defensive coordinator Jim Knowles has emphasized the importance of preventing explosive plays by opposing offenses. The Buckeyes defense has been extremely effective in doing so. Through six games, they are one of only three teams in the country to not have allowed a single play to go for 40 or more yards.

That game plan has worked so far, only giving up 9.7 points per game, which is third in the country and a big improvement from the 21.0 mark they put up last year. Knowles said he doesn't like the phrase "bend but don't break" because of the way it sounds, but that's how the Ohio State defense has been this year.

But Penn State's offense is built to move slowly down the field. The Nittany Lions are last in the entire FBS in offensive plays from scrimmage that have gone for 40 or more yards, but they have still been successful in putting points on the board, averaging 44.3 per game which is tied with No. 5 Washington for fifth in the nation.

"Their time of possession is awesome," Knowles said. "I think (they have) the most red zone plays in the country. The challenging part is finding a way to get them off schedule. If they just stick to a schedule, they can move down the field. They've been very successful with that."

One reason they have been so good in time of possession, and moving down the field slowly is because of their run game. Running backs Kaytron Allen and Nicholas Singleton have both averaged over 60 yards per game and have combined for nine touchdowns. Quarterback Drew Allar is also able to escape from the pocket and use his legs if he needs to. They are effective on the ground, and they keep the clock running.

Knowles said when there are late down situations, this makes it even more important that the Buckeyes win that battle on Saturday and force them to lose yardage when they can.

“Try to knock them off, get them behind the sticks,” he said. “But winning the situations, the third downs, that becomes even more important because you can win the third down it’s like stealing a possession.”

Against a good run game, Knowles said it’s possible the defense could use three linebackers to try to stop it. He said safety Sonny Styles is versatile enough to get some time in at the Sam linebacker position, giving Knowles the flexibility to be more creative with his defense when he’s on the field.

Ohio State is 23rd in the country in rushing defense, giving up 109.2 yards per game with Devin Mockobee of Purdue being the first this season to manage more than 100 yards on the ground against them.

“I look at the video and it’s impressive,” Knowles said about the Penn State running backs. “They’re hard running, a good one, two tandem, they hit the hole. And then they have the ability to bounce, they bounce plays a lot. So, the film shows that they’re really good. And they’ll be a force to contend with.”