

Magnitude Of Season Opener Not Lost On Ohio State



Ohio Stadium will serve as the center of the college football world on Saturday, as No. 2 Ohio State opens the season against No. 5 Notre Dame.

Saturday's contest will be just the seventh all-time meeting between the two storied college football programs and like a majority of their previous matchups, the stakes are as high as ever. As the Buckeyes and Irish look to begin their respective seasons 1-0, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said the historic nature of the game is not lost on him and his team.

"It's certainly exciting to be a part of it," Day said on Tuesday. "Not only is it the 100th anniversary of the 'Shoe but just the fact that's a special matchup. Having Notre Dame, such a prestigious program in the mid-west, and Ohio State get together for a home-and-home is exciting."

This is the first time Ohio State has kicked off a season in a top-five matchup, but unlike the start of last season — the Buckeyes will benefit from meaningful experience from their 2021 campaign.

Several star players return on both sides of the ball for the Buckeyes, as the offensive three-headed monster of quarterback C.J. Stroud, running back TreVeyon Henderson and wide receiver Jaxson Smith-Njigba will all be back for the Scarlet and Gray in 2022. Defensively, tackles leader Ronnie Hickman and breakout sophomore cornerback Denzel Burke, alongside the budding stars on the defensive line J.T. Tuimoloau, Tyliek Williams and Jack Sawyer, are all expected to take another leap forward starting on Saturday.

As the Buckeyes spent fall camp installing a new defense and refining their fundamentals, center Luke Wypler expressed excitement toward finally being able to hit someone other than his teammates.

"I can't wait," Wypler said. "I'm so excited to stop hitting our own guys and finally get a different team in there with a different colored jersey. For me, that's the most exciting thing."

The Buckeyes have emerged victorious in each of their last four meetings with the Fighting Irish, with their two last wins coming in the Fiesta Bowl in Glendale, Ariz. As the two storied programs will meet in the regular season for the first time since 1996 on Saturday, the Buckeyes expect Ohio Stadium to be rocking when the ball flies off the tee at 7:30.

"I expect them to be the best fans in the world," Smith-Njigba said. "That's what they always bring, always bring a lot of juice and energy. We're going to need that. I'm excited to play in front of however many people are going to be there, it's going to be an awesome experience."