

Mike Yurcich: Ohio State Offense Looking For Leadership From QB

Before the Buckeyes' quarterbacks room got shaken up, starting April 18 with redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin transferring out and culminating April 27 with Kentucky junior graduate transfer Gunnar Hoak transferring in, passing game coordinator/position coach Mike Yurcich preached Ohio State's need for leadership under center early in spring camp.

Hoak enters with an uphill battle to become OSU's starting signal caller after sophomore Justin Fields emerged as the favorite for the fall. Regardless of how the competition shakes out, Yurcich made his stance clear on the group March 8 after Ohio State completed its second spring practice at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

"I think the big thing that you're looking for is leadership," Yurcich said. "That's a big focus, how the team responds to that individual, their presence, their leadership, being able to be vocal at times and then it's really performance, it's productivity, is (what) you're looking at.

"You have to secure the football and those lines, there's a lot of things that factor into it. A lot of things like knowing pass protections, knowing when to get in and out of plays, knowing to throw the ball away.

"All of those things that encompass good, sound football and helping your team win football games. All of those things factor into it."

Hoak (6-4, 212) has ground to gain after Fields (6-3, 223) spent an entire semester around the Buckeyes following a transfer from Georgia, getting in the weight room for winter workouts Jan. 17-March 2 and continuing on the field March 6-April 13.

Fields gained trust from teammates, especially on offense, as he climbed his way up the Buckeyes' quarterbacks before Baldwin transferred to TCU. While Fields made a solid first impression, Yurcich wanted to see everyone in OSU's position group take the initiative.

"I think there's different levels of it and I certainly think that playing and being the guy — a proven, productive player — gives them credit, there's no question about it," Yurcich said. "But at the same time, you still can be a very good leader at the backup quarterback. The third-string quarterback can be a very good leader.

"How they work in the weight room, how they handle their academics, how they handle their social life — all of those things fall into leadership. So it doesn't limit you, so to speak, to what you can be and how big of a leader you can be. You can coach up younger guys, more inexperienced guys. All of those things are strong leadership qualities that we look for."

Yurcich's sentiments indirectly include fifth-year senior Chris Chugunov (6-0, 208) and sophomore walk-on Danny Vanatsky (6-1, 205), who round out the signal callers on Ohio State's post-spring depth chart.

La Verne (Calif.) Bonita three-star recruit JP Andrade (6-3, 205) follows Chugunov and Vanatsky, committing April 26 as the Buckeyes' preferred walk-on from the 2019 class.

With five quarterbacks slated to be on the 2019 roster, Yurcich's spring assessment of the position group still applies as OSU enters summer workouts and fall camp.

"What we're trying to do is that we make sure we create the best competition that we can and try to produce the best offense we can and that is develop guys," Yurcich said. "So right now, what we want to try to do is make sure that those guys are getting those reps that they need in the film room, on the practice field and that's what's in our best interest as a team right now is to get those guys better."

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