

Mitch Rossi Adds Old-School Wrinkle To OSU Offense



There's been some debate over whether Ohio State graduate tight end Mitch Rossi should be listed as a fullback.

The Tennessee native lined up at the traditional power back spot on a few select plays against Toledo and Wisconsin, taking one handoff in each game. It's a new wrinkle based on old football tricks for Ohio State head coach Ryan Day.

Sept. 27 Rossi was asked whether it's fair to designate him as a tight end anymore.

"I'm just a ballplayer, in my eyes, and that's the most fullback answer I can give you right there," Rossi said as the press room erupted in laughter. "I like the mentality of fullback play. I think that I'm embodying that on the field, so whatever you want to call me works for me."

Regardless of what he's called positionally, Rossi has carved out a role for himself in the Buckeyes' offense in 2022, expanding on his usage in 2021.

"We kind of recognized it toward the end of last year (what he could do), but hadn't really put a lot into it," Day said. "Then as we went into the Utah game and the Rose Bowl, you could see we started to use Mitch a little bit. Then we had a long conversation with him in the offseason about this very thing."

Rossi's role last season served as a pure lead-blocker out of spread formations, lined up offset in the backfield to help pave the way for then-freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson and others.

Against Toledo Sept. 17, Ohio State unveiled its new design for the former walk-on. Facing a third-and-goal at the Toledo 1-yard line, Rossi came into the game to set up an I-formation with his hand in the dirt behind third-year quarterback C.J. Stroud. Rossi took a handoff and plunged into the endzone.

It's a play that Rossi said he'd only started practicing earlier that week. His phone blew up with texts afterward.

"It was cool, it was a lot. A lot of family and friends reaching out, happy for me," Rossi said. "The work that I put in behind the spotlight that led to that moment — it was great."

Rossi again entered as a vintage hand-in-the-dirt fullback against Wisconsin Sept. 24, converting a third-and-1 on another fullback dive.

"We see some things in Mitch that really can help us," Day said. "You're starting to see it. You're starting to see what he can do, and it's a weapon for us. And as we go, especially situationally, it's going to be very, very important for us."

Before Rossi got any meaningful playing time for the Buckeyes, offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson had spoken to him about some fullback-type responsibilities. He was a running back when he first walked on at OSU.

Eager to see the field, it was hard for Rossi to believe that the innovation could be his solution. But he put his faith in the coaching staff.

"It was tough, because sometimes it didn't seem like there was a whole lot of light at the end of the tunnel," Rossi said. "But I did believe in his idea and his vision, because he's done that before and he would kind of show me stuff that he's done at other places, or successful NFL teams they're using that would work well against (other teams) when we're scheming up defenses. I just kept the faith and kept working."

Of course, he still sees the field as an in-line tight end and lead blocker in the spread, too. He's embraced the "blue collar" mentality of Ohio State's tight end room.

"I think it started with Luke (Farrell), Jake (Hausmann), (Jeremy Ruckert) and has passed down to us, we just take pride in our toughness," Rossi said. "Obviously Cade (Stover) is that type of guy too. I think it's just the culture of the room."

Rossi's next chance to throw some old-school wrinkles into Ohio State's new-school offense comes against Rutgers Oct. 1.