

My Thoughts: Penn State-Michigan Proves It Could Be A One-Game Season For Ohio State



Ohio State was off this past weekend after getting off to a 6-0 start this season, but it was still an eventful week of college football that helped us learn a few things about where the Buckeyes go from here.

After this weekend's game against Iowa - a likely win, considering the Hawkeyes have one of the nation's worst offenses - the next stage of the season will begin in Happy Valley, with the Buckeyes set for a noon kickoff at Penn State. The Nittany Lions are currently No. 16 in the country and could rise with a win over Minnesota this weekend, so it will likely be another high-profile matchup between Ohio State and Penn State.

Unlike matchups in previous years, though - almost every game in this series has been competitive dating back to the Nittany Lions' most recent win in 2016 - there isn't much reason to believe that Penn State will put up a fight coming off a 41-17 loss to Michigan.

The offense was entirely ineffective under the direction of quarterback Sean Clifford, and the defense gave up 563 yards and their most points in nearly two years (a 41-21 loss to Iowa on Nov. 21, 2020). Without some poor red zone execution from Michigan leading to four field goals by the Wolverines, the final could have been even uglier.

Given that the Nittany Lions shouldn't present much of a challenge, that means Ohio State will have precisely one opportunity to get challenged this season, and it will come in the final game of the regular season against Michigan. The Wolverines, even with some wins that were probably closer than they should have been, have appeared as one of the most dominant teams in the country this season, holding a 7-0 record and a scoring offense and defense both in the top 10 nationally.

This past weekend's slate also cast some doubt on some of college football's top contenders. It was an impressive win for Tennessee over Alabama, though the Volunteers' defense was still suspect in the

win. The previously undefeated USC Trojans lost their first game, and while Clemson is still undefeated, the Tigers struggled to put away Florida State and have looked shaky at points this season.

Georgia has looked its usual dominant self, but there's an argument to be made that Michigan could be the best remaining team on Ohio State's schedule, even including the College Football Playoff. The Wolverines - barring an upset against Michigan State on Oct. 29 or even No. 18 Illinois on Nov. 19, one week before they play the Buckeyes - should enter the game undefeated, setting up the first top-four matchup in The Game since 2016 and just the eighth in series history.

While Michigan's defense has lost some contributors from last season like Aidan Hutchinson and David Ojabo, the Wolverines are still allowing just 12.1 points and 250 yards per game. Offensively, running back Blake Corum - who has rushed for 901 yards and 13 touchdowns on 146 carries - has appeared as a dark horse Heisman candidate, viewed as one of the top playmakers in the country.

Of course, this provides the perfect opportunity for Ohio State to right the wrongs of last season. Corum will face the Buckeyes' rushing defense that is allowing only 93.2 yards per game, and Ohio State will try to avoid him having a performance like Hassan Haskins last season in which he finished with 169 rushing yards and five touchdowns. Conversely, Ohio State's rushing attack - which had just 64 total yards on 30 carries against the Wolverines last season - will look for a better outing with TreVeyon Henderson having another year under his belt and Miyan Williams breaking out in his junior season.

If Ohio State can knock off Michigan and return to the top of the rivalry, it will be the first - and perhaps easiest - step toward advancing to the College Football Playoffs and bringing home the program's first national championship since 2014.