

New Faces On Buckeye Offense Impressing Day



It's easy, at times, to forget that Ohio State's early enrollee freshman class is still very much in the early stages of development when it arrives in Columbus, despite the lofty expectations hoisted upon the vast majority of the group because of recruiting rankings and hype. The new faces populating the Buckeye roster have plenty of growing to do before they're ready to take on full college football action, especially at a school like Ohio State. That process differs for everyone, but as head coach Ryan Day alluded to on Monday in speaking to media, it is still very much a process that has everyone – no matter their ranking – has to go through.

"When you come to Ohio State, typically you're highly recruited, and there's an expectation that comes with that," Day said. "Sometimes for the player but a lot of times for the parents and the people back home and the public. To me, when guys come in, the No. 1 thing they have to worry about is getting developed. That's it. One person's timetable is maybe different than another person's timetable, because of where they grew up, how they grew up, what they were exposed to, their physical, mental make-up, maybe the position room, who knows. There are a lot of things that come into play and there's a fine line. You can't wait around for anybody, there has to be urgency to get on the field, but you also have to have the mindset of, 'I have talent, but I also have to have skill and discipline in my life.' And that's the goal."

In some cases, that process is even harder for players to adapt to than it is for fans and analysts anxiously awaiting the fulfillment of those lofty expectations.

"I think sometimes guys can get a little derailed because they want it right now," Day said. "They want to play and get on the field and go, right now. Sometimes they're ready, sometimes they're not. The faster they develop, the faster they create skill and discipline, the faster they get on the field. I think when you see a lot of guys leaving and transferring from different schools, that trend going on in college football, I think at the end of the day, it has to come down to, 'Where do I want to develop?' And that's where recruits have to go, where they think they're going to develop the most, and when they get there, that has to be the focus. It can't be, 'How fast do I get on to the field?' It isn't just going to happen, poof, and you get onto the field."

Although Ohio State is making a point of being sure that those new faces are earning their playing time and working through the process the right way, a few freshman have stood out to Day in spring practice, both for their production on the field and their maturity in developing off of it. Three Buckeye freshmen have had their black stripes removed so far this spring, starting with wide receiver Marvin

Harrison Jr. and defensive end Jack Sawyer and continuing a few days later with running back TreVeyon Henderson, the latter two of which entered Ohio State as five-star prospects. When asked about some of his new players, Day did not beat around the bush: he's very happy with what he's seen, starting with the son of Marvin Harrison Sr., an NFL Hall of Famer.

"Lot of discipline, excellent attention to detail with his routes, somebody who cares a lot," Day said of Harrison. "He's in here after hours, he's here early in the morning, he takes a lot of pride in his work and he's making plays. Just a freshman who has a long way to go, but early impressions have been excellent."

Though Harrison's high school teammate, quarterback Kyle McCord has yet to join the group of freshman free of the black stripe, he too has impressed his new coach through three weeks of spring practice, though Day said that he has to continue to improve his preparation on the mental side of the game.

"I just think it's about getting more reps and trying to get better with each play," Day said of McCord. "The thing you can't do is that you can't run every single play into all different coverages every practice. What you have to do is be able to play the plays in your mind, play with an imagination, put the work in off the field. Because if you can solve some of those problems on your own, not just when you're in the building and when you're out at practice, you're going to accelerate your learning. I think he's done a good job of that, I think he can continue to get better at it because that's a huge part of the game."

That's a skill that the best of the best developed long ago and have used to dominate in the NFL for years.

"When we talk about some of the best of the game right now in the NFL, when we talk about the people that have had the most success with (Tom) Brady, (Drew) Brees, (Aaron) Rodgers, Russell Wilson, the thing that they've mastered is that they know where they're going with the ball before it even happens," Day said. "When that ball hits their hands they know where it's going for the most part, they've already played the game in their heads and they can make it look really easy. If you're catching the ball and trying to figure it out or if you're reacting or you haven't thought through your contingency plan on a play... (that's) not good."

"We've been challenging the quarterbacks with that and Kyle has done a good job with it so far. There's no way to speed up the process other than doing what we're talking about. He's off to a good start, has a bright future but just like with anything else it's just going to take reps."

McCord's potential battery mate in the backfield down the road, Henderson, has been another player to grab Day's attention this spring. He's flashed his ability both in private and on Ohio State's official social media feeds, which festooned the timeline with video of Henderson gliding effortlessly through the Buckeye defense last week.

The future of #ToteNation is bright □@evanpryor3 @TreVeyonH4
pic.twitter.com/COno7S2pb9

— Ohio State Football (@OhioStateFB) April 8, 2021

Though the highs are obviously high and the flash is there, Ohio State is still working on Henderson's consistency, thanks partially to the year away from the game that he was forced to take as a result of the coronavirus pandemic that canceled Virginia high school football in 2020.

"Still really young, didn't play last year, hasn't played football in a while," Day said of Henderson. "That's the other thing. He and a few other guys who are young freshman last year didn't play high school ball. But he has done a good job, he's had a good attitude, he has a good work ethic. He's done everything right so far. Now, he still has to play more and learn every day - he needs a million reps - but the talent is there, the work ethic is there. I think he's going to have a really bright future for us. He's done everything we've asked him to do so far, he's flashed at times already and we're excited to see what that looks like during the spring game."

Ohio State's new standouts will get the chance to show the nation what their new coaches have seen for the last three weeks this Saturday in the annual spring game, but as they do, keep in mind the words of the Buckeye head coach: the path for each may be different, but the goal in the end is the same.

"You have to spend time and you have to work at it, and everybody has a different journey in that along the way, you look at different guys and different stories, maybe it took five years, one year, two years, everybody is on a different (path)," Day said. "Sometimes it's hard because they feel the pressure from the outside and I think that's a big challenge for our guys here. There's great exposure, there's a great platform for our players, but at the same time there's a little bit of that pressure that goes on there. Sometimes these guys just need the room to grow and to understand that it takes time, but on the other side of that let's not wait around, let's try to get on the field as fast as you can."