

Ohio State Head Coach Ryan Day Calls Special Teams Performance In Cotton Bowl “Not Good Enough”



Ohio State’s special teams unit — led by coordinator Parker Fleming — has received flak from fans and media alike for its overall ineffectiveness all season, and that criticism seemed to reach its apex after another subpar performance in the Cotton Bowl.

Despite now-former Ohio State punter Jesse Mirco having a solid outing on Friday night where he averaged 48.2 yards per punt and pinned Missouri inside the 20-yard line on three of his eight kicks, the unit was still crippled by some glaring mistakes. Those faults were present early and often in Fleming’s unit, where they were called for a delay of game penalty on a punt early in the first quarter, then flagged for illegal block in the back and holding fouls in the second and third quarters.

While the three penalties were largely inconsequential in the game, Ohio State’s special teams unit was also plagued by some more impactful miscues, none more important than kicker Jayden Fielding’s missed 48-yard field goal in the third quarter and Jayden Ballard’s decision to call a fair catch on a Missouri punt that reached Ohio State’s 5-yard line.

Day, who did praise Mirco’s punting after the game, admitted that the special teams miscues simply cannot happen if his team wants to emerge victorious in a bowl game, and that the group’s overall performance against Missouri fell short of the expectations set by the program.

“I thought overall, early on, the whole punting operation, other than the delay of game, (was good),” Day said. I felt like we were punting with good hang time, and we were covering and flipping the field at times pretty well. So, I thought that was well done...But we shouldn’t catch the ball on the 5-yard line. Our heel should be on the 8. I think (Ballard) felt at that moment that (Missouri’s punt coverage) was right behind him, and they were going to pin it inside the 4. But still, you have to stick to your rules in that situation.

“And then we missed the field goal, and that one was big at the time,” Day said. “It was a little momentum swing, and they get the ball back on the 30-yard line. There were some good things there but not good enough.”

Ohio State’s ineffectiveness on special teams in the Cotton Bowl capped off a difficult year for Fleming and his unit, one that was plagued all season by penalties and mental miscues, which is a reality that has also prompted many conversations about a potential coaching change during the offseason. For Day, though, he said he will need to evaluate each and every position — special teams included — before he can make a decision of that magnitude.

“We’re going to look at everything,” Day said after the Cotton Bowl loss. “Ultimately, this is an example of a game. Nobody cares that you have a freshman quarterback in there. You’ve got to go win the game. And it didn’t happen.”