

Ryan Day, Jeff Hafley and Kevin Wilson Preview Ohio State's Season Opener Against Florida Atlantic



Ohio State head coach Ryan Day held his first weekly media obligation of the season on Tuesday afternoon, answering questions for about 30 minutes regarding his team's preparation for Florida Atlantic, battles for various starting positions and much more.

Additionally, sports information director Jerry Emig announced the staff will issue a status report on players on Friday afternoons leading up to the game as opposed to discussing specific injuries. The Buckeyes will also release a two- or three-deep depth chart that same day.

Here's a brief recap of what Day had to say:

- Day, who shaved his camp beard, said he is excited to get started this week. "Looking forward to get going here on Saturday."
- Day praised Florida Atlantic head coach Lane Kiffin for doing "innovative things" with the Owls.
- Day said they have to tackle, take care of the football and block. "Playing a clean game is very important."
- "We want to see what we look like," Day said. Mentioned how camp starts to feel stale after competing against your teammates for a month, so they're looking forward to going live with a new quarterback and new defensive scheme. "This is a journey. This is not a finished product by any stretch of the imagination."
- Day said they're keeping traditions like Skull Session, Quick Cals, singing Carmen Ohio after the game, etc. "One of the greatest thing about Ohio State is the traditions. We want to keep that going."
- Asked Florida Atlantic's quicker, who punted 16 times last season, Day responded with a laugh and said the Buckeyes already have a pretty good punter in Drue Chrisman.
- Day said seven to eight linemen will play on Saturday.
- Day said passing game coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mike Yurcich, offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson and co-defensive coordinator/secondary coach Jeff Hafley will coach from the press box while co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison will be on the sideline. "Once we get into the game, we'll see if there's any kinks we need to work out."
- On preservation of quarterback Justin Fields, Day said, "He's gotta go play the game. We can't be

walking on eggshells with injuries.”

- Asked about differences between last year and this season, his first as the full-time head coach, Day said he’s fired up for Saturday. “When I’m with the team in the tunnel, (I’m going to) take it in and take a deep breath. What an unbelievable opportunity this is.”
- Day on starting quarterback Justin Fields: “The good thing about Justin is he throws it just as good as he runs it, and vice versa.”
- Day said right tackle Branden Bowen will start at right tackle. It’ll be his first start since he suffered a leg injury in the win over Maryland in 2017.
- Thayer Munford will start at left tackle after missing the Rose Bowl and spring practice and being limited fall camp with a hip injury, Day said.
- “Don’t be surprised to see (freshman center) Harry Miller” on Saturday, Day said. Joshua Alabi and Nicholas Petit-Frere will play at the tackle spots, as well.
- Asked how the offense and defense are doing with preventing and forcing turnovers, Day said, “We’ll find out Saturday.”
- With senior defensive end Jonathon Cooper nursing an injury, Day expects Tyreke Smith, Tyler Friday, Zach Harrison and Javontae Jean-Baptiste to fill the void.
- Athletic director Gene Smith asked Day about shaving his beard. “That was supposed to be a camp beard.” His plan has always been to shave before the first game.
- Day said Bowen’s attitude has been great. “He’s been through a lot. I just love his approach right now. He’s practicing at a high level. This is a guy who I think is going to have a great year.”
- Day mentions penalties, energy level and depth are things he’s paying extra attention to on Saturday.
- Despite having a few games under his belt already, Day said “the nerves and anxiety are not going to go away” no matter if it’s game No. 1 or game No. 100.
- Day said he’s going to have “very little” involvement with the defense.
- The Buckeyes are going to lean on running back J.K. Dobbins quite a bit this season, Day said. May have some 20-carry games. “He’s ready to be a workhorse.”
- Day on Ohio State’s policy to not discuss injuries. “We just had discussions with administration, with the medical staff and sat down and made the decision that this was the best for us moving forward.”
- Day said he turns off his phone and turns down the radio on his 20-minute drive to campus every day so that he can have quiet time to think about the program and “the things you need to focus on” as head coach.
- Day said Kentucky transfer quarterback Gunnar Hook hasn’t had enough snaps to have a grasp on the offense, which would lead us to believe redshirt senior Chris Chugunov might be the No. 2 quarterback for the Florida Atlantic game. If either sees the Field, Day admits the offense “is probably looking a little different.”
- Day on players like Bowen, who are fifth-year seniors: “They’re almost player/coaches.”
- Day said Ohio State is the only college program he would have been willing to leave the NFL for. Asked about Alabama or Notre Dame, Day responded, “Only Columbus.”

Ohio State co-defensive coordinator and secondary coach Jeff Hafley also spent time at the podium on Tuesday afternoon.

- Hafley said likes to coach the game from the press box because it takes the crowd out of it and allows him to focus more on what’s going on.
- “I think he’s a really smart football coach,” Hafley said of Kiffin. Praises the Owls’ offense and skill position players, too.

- Hafley said he knows who is starting at linebacker, but will wait until Friday's depth chart to announce. "Coach (Al) Washington has done a really good job" with that unit.
- Hafley echoes Day by placing emphasis on tackling.
- "Jeff (Okudah) has the talent, the size, the length, he can run," Hafley said, but adds his mindset and overall approach could help him become a first-round draft pick. "Those are the things that I talk to him about."
- Hafley on calling the right play against a certain offensive call. "It feels great. Call a blitz from the right hash into the right play... It's like, 'Shit, I got it.'"
- Asked how the defensive scheme is coming together, Hafley said "having your eyes in the right place, running as hard and as fast as you can and tackling" are most important.
- Hafley makes it a point to note that he was a college coach for 10 years and in the NFL for just seven. "I'm a college guy."

Offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson spoke for about 15 minutes, as well.

- "When he takes off running, he's maybe as fast as I've seen at quarterback," Wilson said of Fields. "I've been around some talented players, but his skillset is as high as I've been around."
- Wilson recalls a play from his time at Oklahoma during Heisman Trophy winner Sam Bradford's second career start. Called a post play, but Bradford saw it was double covered and dumped it off to a fullback. "Sam, being a great player, made it look right and made it look easy." Hopes to see the same from Fields this season. "The real ones have the skillset on Saturday."
- Wilco said Ohio State has to "pick (its) spots" when exposing Fields to contacts. Adds they'll try to find ways to minimize the number of times he's in harm's way.
- Wilson said they have some great depth along the offensive line. On Bowen specifically, he said he's had a great work ethic, displays great pad level and expects him to play well this season.
- "Harry Miller has had an outstanding camp playing a position with a lot of stress," Wilson said.
- On seven or eight players who can play along the line, Wilson said they'll play it by ear when determining when to rotate them in and out rather than having wholesale, hockey-style line changes. Expect to see Alabi, Miller, Petit-Frere and Gavin Cupp on Saturday.
- On expectations for the first game of the season, Wilson said "you have a game plan until you get punched in the mouth."