



Ohio State Still Not Naming Backup Quarterback

Even if a pick has been made in the battle for Ohio State's No. 2 quarterback position behind Justin Fields, quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis wasn't tipping his hand in a media availability on Oct. 13.

The first-year Buckeye assistant stuck strictly to the company line, complimenting the play off all three contenders - freshmen Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud and senior Gunnar Hoak - but refused to name an official backup with the start of the 2020 season just over a week away.

"I think that's something that we'd evaluate," Dennis said when asked about who the backup will be when Ohio State takes on Nebraska. "Coach Day, myself, coach (Kevin) Wilson, we'd all go in and we'd talk about it, but let's just hope that we get to keep Justin Fields."

While Ohio State is not yet ready to name an official No. 2 quarterback to fill in behind Fields, Dennis did speak positively about all three quarterbacks, specifically the growth that the freshmen have had in the understanding of the playbook since their arrival in January.

"Gunnar Hoak, first off, he's a guy who's been around," Dennis explained when asked for an evaluation of his backups room. "He's seen a different college offense before so he's seen a lot of football. He's extremely talented. He's kind of the older guy in the group, obviously.

"And then Jack and C.J., they're literally just pedal to the medal, trying to learn everything they can and just soak it in and they're both doing an unbelievable job.

“They’re both doing really well. They both have good days and they both have bad days but those guys are grinders. They’re both extremely talented. They’re both really diving in, want to know the offense and in our reality, they have a great guy to look up to in Justin Fields. So they know, (if they aren’t preparing as hard as Fields), can they truly be where he is in the future. Justin is a great example and those guys are trying to do everything he does.

“All three of those guys are doing a great job and they’re really grinding, and like I said earlier, everyone has to prepare like they’re the starter.”

In 2019, without a scholarship freshman quarter on the roster, Ohio State leaned heavily on graduate transfer Chris Chugunov, who took the vast majority of the quarterback reps after Fields, both in garbage time and when Fields struggled with injuries. Hoak threw just five passes in 2019 and has still yet to lose his black-stripe.

Even without the steady experience of a player like Chugunov, Dennis said that he’s confident in Ohio State’s quarterback stable, even in the case of an emergency that requires a non-Fields quarterback to take significant reps in a game.

“We’d be ready to go,” Dennis said when asked if Ohio State is confident in playing one of those backups if needed. “There’s no doubt. They’d be ready to go. They know the offense, but they’re continuing to get better, they’re continuing to grow, they know that they’re not where they need to be, but they’re definitely grinding every day and getting where they want to go.”

In those garbage time reps, which Ohio State expects to see quite a few of this season, given the fact that Chugunov threw 43 passes in 2019, the Buckeye do not yet have a plan for splitting reps, nor do they have a defined player that will take the bulk of those opportunities.

“I don’t know that we’ve really sat down and thought about it, but I think that long-term, we’re going to do what’s best for Ohio State for that year and just continue to grow guys and to get guys better,” Dennis said. “But to say that we thought about it, no, we haven’t.”