

Predictions: Ohio State Ends Season On A Positive Note With Cotton Bowl Win Over Missouri



Ohio State's season will come to an end on Friday as it faces Missouri in the Cotton Bowl, set for an 8 p.m. kickoff at AT&T Stadium and looking to build momentum heading into 2024.

Here are Buckeye Sports Bulletin's final staff predictions of the season, and our thoughts as to how the competition between the Buckeyes and Tigers will shake out.

Patrick Engels: New-Look Buckeyes Impress In Tight Cotton Bowl Win

Ohio State's game with Missouri in the Cotton Bowl may not carry the same weight and implications as a College Football Playoff matchup, but it still carries a lot of storylines that are worth noting before the two teams square off. Those storylines start at the quarterback position with the Buckeyes, where sophomore Devin Brown is stepping in for now-Syracuse signal caller Kyle McCord.

Brown received minimal playing time for Ohio State in his second year with the program, mostly as a rushing threat, but he brings a multi-dimensional threat to this offense that has not been present at the quarterback position all season, maybe even since Justin Fields departed. Brown's skills as a runner should open up the Buckeyes' offense against the Tigers' defense on Friday — one that will be missing three key contributors — and no player may benefit more from that than running back TreVeyon Henderson.

With Missouri also having to focus on Brown's rushing threat, Henderson may have a lot more open holes to run through at AT&T Stadium, which could pave the way for him to have some more explosive runs. Look for him to break one open for a touchdown. As for the passing offense, the Buckeyes still have enough talent on the perimeter — especially with Emeka Egbuka playing — to be effective and make Brown's job easy. This could allow for the young Brown to settle in early and show off his elite arm talent, one that both his teammates and coaches have been praising since he was thrust into the starting role.

I see Brown and Ohio State's offense having no problems moving the ball against a Tigers' defense that

is missing some guys, which puts the onus on the Buckeyes' defense to make a statement and give them an ever bigger advantage. Jim Knowles' unit is coming off a second-half implosion against Michigan, and that should have them motivated heading into Friday's game, but they will certainly have their hands full against Missouri's talented offense. The Buckeyes must first limit the production of standout wide receiver Luther Burden III and running back Cody Schrader, who will both be fired up to showcase their talents on the big stage.

If the Buckeyes can limit Missouri's two stars and contain dual-threat quarterback Brady Cook in the pocket, I see Day's team gaining the advantage on Friday and coming away with a close, hard-fought victory. Even without superstar Marvin Harrison Jr., Ohio State is still more talented than the Tigers — and most importantly, still seem motivated to finish the season out strong — which should give them the edge in "Jerry World." **Ohio State 31, Missouri 20**

Braden Moles: Brown Has Coming Out Party In Cotton Bowl

The Cotton Bowl will serve as much as a cap to this season as it will a start of next season, and I think a good chunk of the roster — specifically Brown — will capitalize to build momentum heading into next year.

It will be Brown's first start, yes, but the talent on the offense with Henderson, Egbuka and Carnell Tate should offer plenty for Brown to find success in his first start, especially with Missouri missing a handful of key defensive players such as cornerback Ennis Rakestraw Jr. and linebacker Ty'Ron Hopper. Brown will also present a dual-threat ability that has not been seen at Ohio State since Justin Fields, though it remains to be seen how green his light is to take off and run.

I'm also interested in how Ohio State's defense will handle perhaps the most explosive offense it has faced this season. Quarterback Brady Cook and wide receiver Luther Burden III are arguably the best the Buckeyes have seen at their respective positions, and it should make for an entertaining battle, even if Eichenberg is out while continuing to nurse his arm injury.

Missouri certainly has the advantage in terms of intangibles coming into this one, as the Tigers will mostly be at full strength and could arguably have a bit more "want" to win the Cotton Bowl. But I think the Buckeyes are still going to come out focused, and at the end of the day, Ohio State is a more talented team than Missouri, and it's going to show. **Ohio State 28, Missouri 21**

Greg Wilson: Defense Steps Up In Cotton Bowl Win

Since Ohio State isn't in the College Football Playoff, one of the questions for all of December was whether the roster would look even remotely the same due to opt outs. Now that we are just a day away from the game, it seems like Harrison could be the only one to be on the sideline for the game.

Defensively there haven't been any opt outs or starters that have transferred out of Ohio State, but Tommy Eichenberg might miss the game with the arm injury he's been nursing since Rutgers. Missouri's offense can threaten in a lot of different ways, but the Buckeyes have only given up 11 points per game this season. Tigers running back ran for almost 1,500 yards in the regular season, and wide receiver Luther Burden almost matched Harrison's yardage, but the Buckeyes have the capability to limit star players and big plays with Knowles calling plays.

Brown is the obvious question mark on the offensive end of the ball, but he has reportedly been

practicing well, and since he and McCord were in a quarterback competition to start the year there might not be much of a difference in their production, though the way they get things done might look a little different. Julian Fleming gone in the transfer portal shouldn't be an issue either since the Buckeyes have so many capable pass catchers always ready to step up.

I think the defense bounces back from what was somewhat of a tough game against Michigan, and the offense is at least close to what it was before if not better with the threat of Brown being able to use his legs. **Ohio State 27, Missouri 20**