

Predictions: Ohio State Tops Hilltoppers To Move To 3-0 On The Season



Many eyes in Columbus are already looking ahead to next week when Ohio State travels to face Notre Dame in South Bend, Ind., but the Buckeyes still have one more game to get through with the Fighting Irish on deck.

Ohio State will welcome in Western Kentucky to Ohio Stadium for a 4 p.m. kickoff on Saturday, and the Hilltoppers should make for an intriguing matchup with a high-scoring offense that should figure for the first significant challenge for the Buckeyes' defense this season.

Here are our predictions for when Ohio State kicks off against Western Kentucky. Check BuckeyeSports.com every Friday for the latest staff predictions.

Patrick Engels: Talent Gap Leads To Win For Ohio State

Quarterback Austin Reed and the high-flying Hilltoppers' offense will pose a significant challenge for an Ohio State defense that has seemingly shown vast improvements in the secondary thus far in 2023. Based on what we've seen so far from players such as Denzel Burke, Davison Igbinosun, Sonny Styles and others, I expect the backend to hold its own. But the bigger question lies within the pass rush

If the Buckeyes front-four — most notably edge rushers Jack Sawyer and J.T. Tuimoloau — continue to get little pressure on the quarterback, it will make life harder for the secondary and allow Reed to pick apart the defense as he surveys the field from the pocket. An increase in pressure can fluster the redshirt senior quarterback, however, who has rarely played in front of a crowd like Ohio State's.

The Buckeyes' offense clearly has the advantage over the Hilltoppers, as recently-annointed full-time starter Kyle McCord can now play freely without looking over his shoulder at Devin Brown. I expect him to feed Marvin Harrison Jr. and Emeka Egbuka again, who will likely feast against an inferior Western Kentucky secondary. The run game should also be able to impose its will on Saturday, which can allow them to take the ball out of Reed's hands.

This will be an interesting challenge for the Buckeyes before they head to Notre Dame next week, but I believe the talent-gap alone should be enough for Ohio State to form a sizeable lead and stymie Reed, wide receiver Malachi Corley and the rest of the Hilltoppers' attack. **Ohio State 38, Western Kentucky 20**

Braden Moles: Rushing Attack Leads The Way In Big Win

Western Kentucky has taken a bold approach this season, opting to not defend opposing team's rushing attacks and instead allowing 264.5 rushing yards per game. This puts the Hilltoppers among known powerhouses such as Kent State and North Texas in allowing an unbelievable number of rushing yards to the competition, and it's something Ohio State is likely to take advantage of in this one.

With head coach Ryan Day noting consistently over the past couple of weeks that he doesn't feel the running backs are getting enough carries, this is a perfect opportunity to get some extended carries for TreVeyon Henderson, Miyon Williams and Chip Trayanum while also stretching the legs of Dallan Hayden and Evan Pryor, who have been mostly missing in action this season. The Buckeyes will certainly throw the ball around a bit, hoping to retain some of that rhythm that Kyle McCord started to develop last week, but this is one that should be played mostly on the ground.

On the other side of the ball, much has been written about Reed and Western Kentucky's explosive passing attack, but I think Ohio State's defense is more than up to the challenge. The cornerbacks and linebackers have been excellent this season for the Buckeyes, and with the Hilltoppers getting the ball quickly out of the hands of Reed, it's unlikely that the pass rush - even if it had played better over the past two weeks, which is something we're certainly keeping an eye on - would have much of an impact this week.

I don't feel Western Kentucky has much to offer defensively against Ohio State, and if the defense is able to continue a strong start to the season, this could be a needed big win for the Buckeyes heading into next week. **Ohio State 42, Western Kentucky 10**

Greg Wilson: Buckeyes Get Challenged, Pull Away Late

The Hilltoppers are a very different team than the Buckeyes are used to seeing and will be looking to throw the ball all over the field. Austin Reed will be a great test for the secondary to see if they are truly returning to BIA form. It will also be a chance for the pass rushers to start making a bigger impact. Even if those two groups do play well, Reed is very talented and will get points on the board.

Western Kentucky's run defense also seems to be shoddy, to put it lightly. They gave up 374 rushing yards to South Florida Week 1, 160 of those to the quarterback. The Buckeyes will likely be looking to run all over them and even though Kyle McCord was officially named the starter, they might even find some time to get Devin Brown, their more mobile quarterback, into the game if that's how it seems to be going for them.

I expect the score will get run up a little more than the first two weeks because the passing game will stop the clock more than the Penguins and Hoosiers run game did. The game is going to stay close for a while, but after halftime the Buckeyes are going to get their act together. **Ohio State 42, Western Kentucky 27**