

Previewing The Spring: Running Backs Return Plenty Of Production



Buckeye Sports Bulletin is previewing every position on Ohio State's roster leading into the beginning of spring practice, which is set to begin on March 7. Check back every weekday for a new breakdown on how the spring might play out for the Buckeyes.

Last season didn't go quite as planned for the Ohio State running back room.

Although the duo of TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams got off to fast starts, injuries knocked the Buckeyes' running game off track. While Henderson and Williams were largely impacted by injuries down the stretch, the Buckeyes turned to then-freshman Dallan Hayden and transfer linebacker Chip Trayanum — who played running back for two seasons at Arizona State before flipping over to defense for the Buckeyes last season — to carry the load on the ground.

As a result of the injuries to Henderson and Williams, Ohio State's production on the ground steadily declined during the second half of the season, but with Hayden and Trayanum getting valuable snaps last season, the Buckeyes will have a stable of potential contributors entering the 2023 campaign. In all, the Buckeyes finished with 192.4 rushing yards per game, which still ranked in the top tier of the Big Ten at third.

"It was a balancing act," running backs coach Tony Alford said of the situation in the running backs room last season. "That was uncharted waters for me. Injuries happen, but to have that many in the time span that we did, that was uncharted waters for me, personally."

Ohio State still will not have its full crop of running backs to kick off spring practices, however, while TreVeyon Henderson works his way back after undergoing foot surgery in December and Evan Pryor continues to rehabilitate a torn ACL — which he sustained during fall camp prior to last season. Henderson missed four of Ohio State's last five games of the season, but still collected 571 yards and six touchdowns on 107 carries.

Although Williams also dealt with his fair share of ailments down the stretch last season, missing OSU's Week 11 bout with Maryland before registering just 11 combined carries against Michigan and Georgia in the Buckeyes' final two games of the season, he'll be available for spring camp. Williams looks to build off of last season, in which he rushed for 825 yards and 14 touchdowns.

In the wake of those injuries, Hayden emerged. Despite joining the Buckeyes as a summer enrollee, Hayden burst onto the scene during the latter half of the season — finishing the season with 553 yards and five touchdowns. Hayden registered back-to-back 100-yard games against Indiana (102) and Maryland (146), adding a trio of touchdowns against the Terrapins, during Ohio State's stretch run.

Now entering his first full spring practice session with the Buckeyes, Hayden will get a full offseason to grow with the program.

"Dallan is going to be an excellent football player for us," Alford said. "Hopefully, him having the year that he had will give him some confidence as we move into the spring. He's never been through an offseason, he's never been through a spring. So this is still new, uncharted waters for him, as well.

"But, he's walking around with a different demeanor than he did at the beginning of the season. He's much more confident and secure with who he is, kind of in his own skin," he continued. "So it's been fun to watch his maturation."

Trayanum's return to running back came as a result of Ohio State's injury situation at the position during the later stages of the season. Although he registered just one carry across the first 11 weeks of the season, Trayanum served as Ohio State's bell cow during The Game — rushing for 83 yards on 14 carries against the Wolverines.

"Chip is a consummate team guy and he just wanted to play," Alford said. "He felt like he could help us with the situation that we were in, with the depleted bodies, if you will. He obviously had played the position at a high level before."

While Trayanum will stick with the running backs, he'll help provide depth at the position alongside walk-ons T.C. Caffey, Cayden Saunders, Chase Brecht and incoming freshman Willtrell Hartson — who will join the team in the summer. Brecht went without a carry last season, while Saunders registered six yards on two carries and Caffey produced 66 yards on 10 attempts — including a highlight-reel 49-yard touchdown run against Toledo, in which he broke numerous tackles en route to the end zone — before sustaining a season-ending injury.

As the Buckeyes boast plenty of talent at the position entering the spring, Alford said that each running back will play a specific role in the offense based primarily on their skill sets.

"It's open conversations with guys and finding scenarios and situations where guys can perform," Alford said. "They kind of have their niche and things that they can do. At the end of the day, you're trying to put your 11 best players on the field. So, we've got to find ways to get guys on the field that can help us win games."

#	Yr.	Name
32	Jr.	TreVeyon Henderson
3	R-Jr.	Miyan Williams

5 So. Dallan Hayden
19 Sr. Chip Trayanum
21 Jr. Evan Pryor
28 So. T.C. Caffey
26 Jr. Cayden Saunders
33 So. Chase Brecht
N/A Fr. Willtrell Hartson