

Quarterback Battle Now On The Table Following C.J. Stroud's Draft Declaration



For the first time in his head coaching career, Ryan Day has an honest-to-goodness quarterback battle on his hands. With C.J. Stroud announcing his departure for the NFL on Monday, this leaves Kyle McCord and Devin Brown, who are entering their third and second years in the program, respectively, to duke things out for the right to go under center for Ohio State.

Day has seen a quarterback battle in his time at Ohio State, with Dwayne Haskins beating out Joe Burrow in 2018 before the latter's transfer to LSU, but he's had a clear starter in each of his four seasons at head coach despite the program pushing battles between Justin Fields and Matthew Baldwin in 2019 or Stroud, Jack Miller and McCord in 2021.

McCord enters the offseason with a clear advantage, having appeared in 12 games for the Buckeyes over the last two seasons. He also has a start under his belt, filling in for a nonconference win over Akron in 2020 where he finished 13-of-18 passing for 319 yards, two touchdowns and an interception.

"I think last year, getting the chance to play was huge," McCord said during this past fall camp. "Getting that opportunity to go out there and get game experience, it really did me a lot of good things. And I think this year, if that same opportunity happens, I know I'll be ready because I know what to expect. I know how to prepare like a starter and how to approach the game and stuff like that. So getting that opportunity last year is definitely huge."

Despite being viewed as the heir apparent to Stroud by most, McCord largely rode the bench this past season, seeing the field late in only a handful of blowouts. Despite Ohio State winning seven games by at least three possessions, McCord — who appeared in seven games — did not play in the first half of any game, and just three times saw the field as early as the third quarter. The other four appearances all came with the clock winding down in the final frame.

In total, he attempted just 20 passes on the season, completing 16 of them for 190 yards and a touchdown, with a 72-yard strike to wide receiver Jayden Ballard accounting for a good chunk of those yards. Brown took the field for just 15 snaps across two games, all to hand the ball off.

"That's just the way that I've always believed the game should be played," Day said. "I think when you're rolling and you're in the third quarter, beginning of the fourth quarter — go play. But when you

start to get towards the end of those games, and they get a little lopsided, I just think that's the way to respect the game."

McCord has the pedigree of a former five-star quarterback, not to mention his connection with wideout Marvin Harrison Jr., who played with McCord at St. Joseph's in Philadelphia. Brown, a former four-star signal caller, offers upside as a passer and can take off with the ball. While he has yet to throw the ball in a game for the Buckeyes, he did show off his arm during practice prior to the Peach Bowl, uncorking a nearly 50-yard bomb to soon-to-be sophomore wideout Kyion Grayes.

Replacing Stroud — a two-time Heisman finalist, no less — is no easy task, and while McCord may have an early lead, this is as open a quarterback battle as there's been at Ohio State in several years.

If the result of that battle results in either McCord or Brown opting to transfer, Ohio State could look to add some depth via the transfer portal, as it would leave Pierre (S.D.) T.F. Riggs four-star quarterback Lincoln Kienholz (6-3, 185) backing up McCord or Brown as a true freshman.