

Ryan Day Dissects Ohio State Battle Between Justin Fields, Matthew Baldwin



Ten practices through Ohio State spring camp, the process of replacing 2018 starter Dwayne Haskins continues with first-year head coach Ryan Day nearing a turning point in the evaluation.

After the Buckeyes wrapped Monday's drills at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, Day met the media in the team room and said he was looking forward to dissecting the film from the first nine practices with his offensive staff.

Inside the two-week window until the April 13 spring game at Ohio Stadium, Day described the two-horse race between sophomore Justin Fields and redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin in a different light from past updates.

"We're going to start looking at the completion percentage and who's moving the ball a little bit here as we get towards the end of the spring," Day said Monday. "I haven't really dug into (naming a leader). ... I want to kind of see the numbers and see where we're at with that because I think we're starting to get to the point where there's enough snaps of film. We can start to get an idea of where guys are at."

Noncommittal to deciding by the end of the spring, Day reiterated the need for leadership from both signal callers. With a wait-and-see approach while Fields and Baldwin man the first-team offense, each has work to do. Fields, however, stepped forward in a sense March 25 when he had his black helmet stripe removed after Ohio State's sixth practice of spring camp.

"(Fields) made plays, came out with a good attitude," Day said Monday. "In terms of understanding what it takes to be a quarterback, preparation wise, did a good job early on. He's only been in the offense here for ... nine practices, so he's picked it up pretty quickly and overall. The fact that he's able to kind of run the offense right now with not a lot of reps under his belt is pretty significant and then made a few plays with his arm and his feet."

The talent Fields possesses has been well-documented since Jan. 4 when he announced his transfer from Georgia and joined the Buckeyes before winter workouts.

As a five-star recruit out of Kennesaw (Ga.) Harrison in the 2018 class, Fields flashed dual-threat ability with the Bulldogs despite a backup role and gained immediate eligibility from the NCAA for the 2019

season.

Along with Baldwin, whom Day hand-picked as an under-the-radar prospect from Austin (Texas) Lake Travis for the 2018 cycle, Fields brings out the best competition after Haskins (2016-18) and four-year starter J.T. Barrett (2013-17) set the standard.

"I think Matt and Justin are both doing a good job competing," Day said Wednesday while surprising Beau Bishop and James Laurinaitis during a post-practice call into the morning show on 97.1 The Fan in Columbus. "(The offense) is going to look different. Their skillsets are different, our offensive personnel is different, replacing four (offensive linemen) up front and three (wide receivers) on the perimeter, who were significant, obviously, a Heisman Trophy finalist quarterback. So it's going to look different. It looked different with J.T., it looked different with Dwayne. This year, it's going to look different and finding that identity right now is critical."

Due to the general inexperience, the evaluation process has been drawn out. With a "group deal" between offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson, passing game coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mike Yurcich and the rest of the staff, OSU's offense adapts to life after Haskins.

"Both quarterbacks, they haven't played, really, and they don't have a lot of experience," Day said. "For all of us to think that they're going to step in and be Dwayne Haskins, that's not going to happen. It's going to take a little bit of time. They haven't been in the offense as long as Dwayne was. So we're going to have to work through it through game one and kind of build as the season goes on, as more reps get under their belt, but I do think to put those expectations on the quarterback early on is unrealistic, again, because I don't think people realize what (Haskins) did. So we're going to be smart about that, really think through what our identity is going to be."

What comes next for Day? With four practices from Friday through April 8, 10 and 12 next week before the spring game, the clock is ticking on the quarterbacks' body of work for camp.

"When you're looking at the numbers, you're looking at accuracy, ability to stand in the pocket and deliver the ball on time, understanding the offense, managing the game, making good decisions in the run game and trying to figure out who you are as a quarterback because everybody's built a little different and their skillsets are different, and then do you use those skillsets to your advantage?" Day said Monday. "And so what I mean by that is, if you can run and you're really athletic, do you do a good job making good decisions reading an end? If you're in the pocket, can you find your check downs? Those type of things as you go. But at the end of the day, can you lead 10 men on the field and do you move the ball into the end zone? That's the goal. And then along the way, there's a lot of different details that go into it."

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