

Ryan Day Has Trust In His Depth Amid Key Injury Concerns



With the availability of key contributors Denzel Burke, Emeka Egbuka, TreVeyon Henderson and others still in question for Saturday's matchup against No. 7 Penn State, Ohio State head coach highlighted the importance of having his entire roster prepared to see the field if their names are called upon.

Speaking with Paul Keels and Jim Lachey on his weekly radio appearance with 97.1 The Fan on Thursday, Day said he needs his players, from top to bottom, to ensure that they are ready and able to take the field when it is needed, a mentality that he added must be crafted during practice.

"When guys go out there to practice, they have to be ready to go," Day said. "Sometimes it's not easy because you may not see the field for a week or two weeks, you just never know. And then before you know it, you're thrust into the role. And a good example of that is with Dallan (Hayden). You have to be there ready to go and have competitive excellence, and the way you do that is you physically practice, but also have the mental reps in the back."

Day noted that the mental preparation his backups must go through on a daily basis is equally as important to their success and readiness come game day. This, according to the coach, may be difficult for these players to sustain as they continue to lose out on reps on the sidelines, but it will be key for their development as they look to take on a larger role — something that may be needed moving forward on a depleted Buckeyes' roster.

"You may not get as many (reps) as the starter, but being able to go through that in your mind and get yourself ready to go, that takes a little bit of work," Day said. "But that's part of growing, and part of being a backup at times. But then when you're thrust into that situation, sometimes you never look back. You take that opportunity and run, and guys have to look at that as an opportunity to go prove themselves when they're on the field."

Ohio State's increasing reliance on sophomore running back Dallan Hayden, who filled in for the injured

Henderson, Miyan Williams and Chip Trayanum and led the team in rushing with 76 yards on 11 carries, has been a significant talking point this week, but Day listed freshmen wide receivers Carnell Tate and Brandon Inniss as other players who can begin to make a larger difference this season. Helping fill the void of the injured Egbuka last week, the tandem put forth their most productive games of their still-young Buckeye careers, with Tate hauling in three receptions for 79 yards and Inniss recording a 58-yard touchdown, his first ever score.

"They deserve to play," Day said. "They've done a nice job. Brandon came in this summer, so he was a little bit more behind than some of the other guys, but you can see the talent. He's a football player, he really is. He does a nice job when the ball is in his hand, he blocks and plays the physical part of the game. But Carnell is somebody that deserves all the opportunities he's getting right now. He came in early, did a nice job, has worked hard to compete to earn playing time, and you're seeing that that hard work pay off here.

"So anytime you can get some of those guys experience, I think it's important," he continued. "When you look at some of our young players who have played earlier in the season as freshmen, later on in the year, whether it's a depth issue or just playing time, they've helped us. So that's usually been the blueprint and those guys are following it."

While the availability of some of Ohio State's skill players is in limbo for Saturday's top-10 matchup, Day still has full trust in his entire roster to excel on the gridiron, a showing of depth that will be key for the success of his team against the Nittany Lions and throughout the rest of the Big Ten slate.

"It's a long season and a physical conference, so you're going to have to have depth," Day said. But when you come in games like this, you're veteran and really good players have to play that way. That's how it goes. So we're going to meet that this week on all levels. But it's certainly good to have depth, because you just never know what's going to happen."