

Three Questions Asked: Iowa



Ohio State is feeling rejuvenated coming off the off week, and the Buckeyes will be met with one of the top defenses in the country when they take on Iowa at Ohio Stadium on Saturday.

"I think we're preparing well coming off this bye week, and I think yesterday was probably one of the best practices we've had in my time here off a bye week," Ohio State center Luke Wypler said Wednesday. "I think we're doing a great job preparing for them, and they're a great team. So we've got to bring our best game."

The off week also provided an opportunity to some hampered Buckeyes to potentially work their way back, so Ohio State could be in position to welcome back several contributors against Iowa, including wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is taking a look at the three biggest questions facing Ohio State and Iowa.

1. Will Jaxon Smith-Njigba play, and what might his impact be?

Wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba has not appeared since Ohio State's win over Toledo back in September, but it appears the star wideout could be nearing a return after missing the last three games.

"He's been practicing," wide receiver Marvin Harrison Jr. said Wednesday. "I'm not going to tell you too much about what he's doing. He's going to be ready."

That seems about as definitive a statement as one can make confirming that Smith-Njigba might take the field against Iowa. Once he returns, though, he'll reenter a wide receiver room that has seen Harrison, Emeka Egbuka and Julian Fleming all step up this season.

It's impossible to discount what he still may be able to bring to the offense, though, so if Smith-Njigba is healthy and playing, it's possible that Ohio State will try to make a bold statement with him back on the

field for the Buckeyes.

2. Can Ohio State's offense overcome Iowa's defense?

Along with Smith-Njigba's potential return, that will be just one aspect of the Ohio State offense going against one of the country's top defenses. The Hawkeyes are allowing just 9.8 points and 264.7 yards per game, and that's with 27 points given up in a 27-14 loss to Michigan on Oct. 1.

The Hawkeyes have several notable playmakers, including inebacker Jack Campbell and defensive back Cooper DeJean, but Ohio State isn't short of explosive players on offense, either. Quarterback C.J. Stroud has thrown for at least four touchdowns in four games this season and has 1,737 passing yards through six games, and there's little indication that he plans to slow down against Iowa.

It should be noted, though, that Iowa has forced 10 turnovers on the season, and the Buckeyes – Stroud specifically – haven't been careful with the ball at times. The Hawkeyes will likely look to use long drives and turnovers to limit Ohio State's offensive possessions, but if the Buckeyes can hold onto the ball, there's likely little that Iowa can do to stop Ohio State's offense.

3. Will Iowa find a groove on offense?

Ohio State's defense vs. Iowa's offense is a battle between an unstoppable force and an immovable object, though in this case, it's simply because the Hawkeyes cannot seem to move the ball on offense. Iowa is averaging just 14.7 points and 238.8 yards per game, both marks near the bottom of the country, while Ohio State's defense is allowing just 15.7 points and 253.5 yards per game.

Neither of those numbers lend credence to Iowa suddenly figuring out the offense, with a mostly inept offense going against a reworked and effective defense, at least through the first six games. Perhaps the Hawkeyes will try and take to the air and pick on Ohio State's cornerbacks that have seen struggles throughout the first half of the season, but that seems to be about the only way Iowa will move the ball, and even then, it doesn't seem likely.