

Three Questions Asked: Spring Game



Ohio State's annual spring game will kickoff at 12:05 p.m. on Saturday, offering a chance for the Buckeyes' coaches - as well as a sizable contingent of fans expected, not to mention those watching on the Big Ten Network - to get a first look at this current iteration of Ohio State inside Ohio Stadium.

The contest will feature Scarlet vs. Gray, with "thud" tackling through the first couple of drives before doing live tackling for the remainder of the game. As for scoring, it will feature traditional scoring for offense, with the defense scoring via takeaway touchdown (6 points), takeaways (3 points), three-and-outs (3 points), quarterback sacks (2 points) and forced punts (1 point).

The first three quarters will be 12-15 minutes with play clock stoppage in effect, and the fourth quarter will be a 10-minute victory lap with a running clock with a 10-minute halftime.

While Ohio State has plenty of practices remaining before kicking off the upcoming season on Sept. 2 at Indiana, the spring game is always an important showing for Buckeyes looking to cement their spots on the depth chart. Here are three key questions facing Ohio State entering Saturday's scrimmage.

1. Can Kyle McCord secure Ohio State's starting quarterback job?

Some air was taken out of the spring game when it was announced that quarterback Devin Brown will miss the scrimmage after undergoing surgery on a finger on his throwing hand, but that doesn't mean all of the intrigue is gone.

Quarterback Kyle McCord, who has been locked in a battle with Brown for the starting job, could fully separate himself from the pack with a strong performance in Ohio Stadium on Saturday.

"It's another step in his progression," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said of what the spring game means for McCord. "I think he's done some good things this spring. Again, brings three years of experience under his belt here, so he knows the offense. He does a great job in meetings, able to take concepts to the field. He's made some really nice throws, he's accurate, and he's shown the ability to lead the team down the field to score."

Even if McCord is able to take the lead, though, Day has said that the competition will resume once Brown is throwing again following his procedure. While it's unlikely that McCord would be named the starter this spring, a big outing could further improve his chances of eventually being named the starting quarterback once that competition concludes, likely in fall camp.

2. Will Ohio State's offensive line stand up to the pressure?

By most accounts, Ohio State's offensive line has not up to par throughout the spring. And it isn't a surprising development given that the Buckeyes are looking to replace starters in the trenches at center and both tackle spots.

The defensive front has routinely gotten the best of the offensive line over the past few weeks, and Day has admitted that the group is not where it needs to be yet.

"We're not crazy behind, but do I wish we were a little further ahead? Yes," Day said. "I think we have some work to do, that's for sure. But, they have gotten better. There have been really good plays, really good snaps and there have been great flashes in practices, but there's also been stuff that we have to get better at...I think it's probably the natural progression of where we are, but we always want to be moving along faster."

Alongside Donovan Jackson and Matthew Jones at guard, Carson Hinzman has taken the most reps at center, though there isn't all that much separation between himself and Victor Cutler Jr. and Jakob James, who has been unavailable for most of the spring. Josh Fryar has lined up at left tackle and Zen Michalski and Tegra Tshabola have taken the reps at right tackle.

While a strong collection of talent, Saturday's extended scrimmage offers a chance for the group to begin jelling as one unit, as well as a definitive starting five to begin making itself clear for Ohio State.

3. Who will step up in Ohio State's secondary?

Outside of the offensive line, there may not be more open jobs up for grabs than in Ohio State's secondary.

Throughout the spring, it's looked as though Denzel Burke and Jordan Hancock have been the starters at cornerback, with Lathan Ransom (bandit), Josh Proctor (adjuster) and Cameron Martinez (nickel) at safety. But there are no shortage of Buckeyes looking to break through, including cornerback Davison Igbinosun and safeties Ja'Had Carter, Kye Stokes and Sonny Styles.

"The safety position has been much more solid (this spring)," Day said. "Lathan and (Proctor) and Sonny, some of the guys back there have done a really nice job."

Saturday's scrimmage offers a chance for the second-string cornerbacks and safeties to leave a mark, and continue pushing to claim a starting job at their respective positions. Another strong spring game performance from Stokes could elevate him, and while Carter has dealt with injuries throughout the spring, he is listed as available for the exhibition, so it could be an important outing for the transfer as he looks to break through.