

UCLA's Chip Kelly: Ohio State's Ryan Day Built To Lead Buckeyes As Urban Meyer's Successor

When the Ohio State football team turned to Ryan Day before its 2018 season began, the second-year offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach replaced seventh-year head coach Urban Meyer for the Buckeyes' first three games with quiet confidence.

Part of Day's self-belief was reassured late last August when his mentor, UCLA head coach Chip Kelly, shot him a text message amid the news.

As controversy swirled in Columbus with Meyer's three-game suspension for the mismanagement of former wide receivers coach Zach Smith, Kelly's sentiments to Day were simple.

"He says, 'You're built for this,'" Day said Aug. 28. "That's what he told me. And that's the thing I keep going to every morning when I wake up is that I'm built for this."

Kelly was right.

After he led OSU to its 3-0 start with wins over Oregon State (77-31, Sept. 1), Rutgers (52-3, Sept. 8) and then-No. 15 TCU (40-28, Sept. 15), his explosive offense finished second in college football (535.6 total yards per game) as the program went 13-1 overall with Big Ten and Rose Bowl titles.

Day succeeded Meyer, who announced his retirement Dec. 4 and transitioned to assistant athletics director of athletics initiatives and relations, as he took over Jan. 2 and kept the machine running.

"It's not that he won an interview," Kelly told USA TODAY's George Schroeder. "It's that his day-to-day work over the two-year span that he was there gave them confidence that he would be able to take on that role. I think the people at Ohio State saw the same things in him that I've seen in him since he was 12."

Kelly coached Day at New Hampshire from 1998-2001, starting out as the Wildcats' offensive line coach (1997-98) before becoming the offensive coordinator (1999-2006).

Day went 653 for 1,089 (59.9 percent) with 7,670 passing yards and 53 touchdowns as UNH's three-year starting quarterback under Kelly.

Day's coaching career continued with Kelly's mentorship, beginning as New Hampshire's tight ends coach (2002) before reconnecting in the NFL between the Philadelphia Eagles (quarterbacks coach, 2015) and San Francisco 49ers (quarterbacks coach, 2016).

"He never panics," Kelly said. "Other kids, when they see pressure situations they kind of get a little helter-skelter. He was never like that. He's always been kind of mature beyond his years. And that's always shown, whether it was any sporting event he's ever been involved in, or if you watch him as a coach."

Since the end of the fall, Day has hit the ground running as Ohio State's head coach.

He kept his 2019 recruiting class mostly intact with 17 signees, and has built a solid foundation for the 2020 and 2021 cycles — all while balancing the Buckeyes' first spring camp from March 6 through April 13.

Time will tell where Day takes OSU once the 2019 campaign gets underway less than four months from now, but the support from Kelly is just the tip of the iceberg.

"I don't think much will change at all," junior running back J.K. Dobbins said Dec. 12. "He's a winner. I'm excited for him. We have a great relationship and I can't wait to see what he can do. He's going to be a legendary head coach."

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