

Welcome To Week 3: Western Kentucky



Ohio State has two games in the books this season, but there are still questions – mostly on offense – that the Buckeyes have to sort out before getting into the brunt of their schedule.

They have one final tune-up game left this season, set to host Western Kentucky for a 4 p.m. kickoff on FOX from Ohio Stadium this Saturday. Check back every Monday at BuckeyeSports.com for a brief preview of the Buckeyes' upcoming opponent, with stories and features throughout the week.

OPPONENT: Western Kentucky (2-0)

The Hilltoppers might be a member of a mostly-down Conference USA, but don't let that fool you – this could be a dangerous team, especially if the Buckeyes get caught looking ahead to Notre Dame.

Western Kentucky's passing attack has been lethal over the last few seasons, boasting a top-15 offense in each of the past two seasons, including the country's second-ranked offense in 2021. That was led, of course, by quarterback Bailey Zappe, who has since departed for the NFL – though that hasn't stopped head coach Tyson Helton from thinking about him.

"Our offensive line did a good job," Helton said following WKU's 41-24 win over South Florida on Sept. 2 to begin this season. "(USF) was big, physical up front. They did a good job with the pass protection and gave Bailey good time. Bailey did a good job with getting the ball out. He didn't hold onto it. ... I said Bailey. (It's) Austin (Reed). Bailey's still on my mind. But Austin did a great job getting the ball out."

Reed has not been to Bailey's level, but offense has never been the problem with the Hilltoppers, though, as the defense has left plenty to be desired. The unit – while leading the nation with 32 turnovers last season – only returns a handful of starters, and they have not done much to inspire confidence through the first few games.

Western Kentucky has allowed 264.5 rushing yards per game, third-worst in the country behind only Kent State (280.5 yards) and North Texas (292.0), which should have running backs coach Tony Alford and Co. on alert. The Hilltoppers are unlikely to win with defense, but look for Helton's squad to try and force Ohio State into a shootout.

PLAYERS TO WATCH:

- **QB Austin Reed:** He threw for 4,744 yards and 40 touchdowns last season, leading Western Kentucky to the No. 14 offense in the country as well as a 9-5 record.
- **WR Malachi Corley:** The biggest recipient of Reed was Corley, who led the team with 101 receptions for 1,295 and 11 touchdowns, though his status is up in the air after missing Western Kentucky's win over Houston Christian on Sept. 9.
- **DE/LB JaQues Evans:** Evans (whose nickname is "Donut") is the Hilltoppers' leading tackler from last season, posting 106 tackles (13.5 for loss) with 8.5 sacks, five pass breakups, eight quarterback hits and a blocked kick, doing pretty much everything that's asked of him for Western Kentucky.

GAME INFO: Ohio Stadium, 4 p.m., FOX

This will be the final home non-conference game of the season before Ohio State wraps up the non-conference slate next week at Notre Dame. The Buckeyes will then have an off week before returning home on Oct. 7 vs. Maryland, making it a three-week stretch between home games.

Ohio State will also go three weeks between home games later this season, when it hosts Penn State on Oct. 21, travels to Wisconsin on Oct. 28 and Rutgers on Nov. 4, and then finally returns to Ohio Stadium on Nov. 11 vs. Michigan State.

SERIES HISTORY: Despite being separated by only about 300 miles, is the first-ever game between Ohio State and Western Kentucky. It will also be mostly uncharted territory, as the Buckeyes have faced just one current member of the CUSA, with a 45-0 win over New Mexico State on Oct. 31, 2009.

Date	Opponent	Location	Time/Result	TV/Streaming
Sept. 2	at Indiana	Bloomington, Ind.	W, 23-3	CBS
Sept. 9	Youngstown State	Columbus	W, 35-7	BTN
Sept. 16	Western Kentucky	Columbus	W, 63-10	FOX
Sept. 23	at Notre Dame	South Bend, Ind.	W, 17-14	NBC/Peacock
Oct. 7	Maryland	Columbus	W, 37-17	FOX
Oct. 14	at Purdue	West Lafayette, Ind.	W, 41-7	Peacock
Oct. 21	Penn State	Columbus	W, 20-12	FOX
Oct. 28	at Wisconsin	Madison, Wisc.	W, 24-10	NBC
Nov. 4	at Rutgers	Piscataway, N.J.	W, 35-16	CBS
Nov. 11	Michigan State	Columbus	W, 38-3	NBC/Peacock
Nov. 18	Minnesota	Columbus	W, 37-3	BTN
Nov. 25	at Michigan	Ann Arbor, Mich.	L, 30-24	FOX
Dec. 29	Cotton Bowl vs. Missouri	Arlington, Texas	L, 14-3	ESPN