

Young Ohio State Secondary Inspires Confidence In The Face Of Injuries



Ohio State has yet to announce the severity of starting safety Josh Proctor's shoulder injury, which he sustained late in a 45-31 victory over Minnesota on Sept. 2.

Any sort of long-term ailment for the senior from Oklahoma would serve as a serious hit for the Buckeyes, who were already down starting cornerbacks Sevn Banks and Cameron Brown - and whose availability for a Sept. 11 matchup with Oregon is also still a question - but head coach Ryan Day didn't seem to be quite as concerned about the potential losses as you may expect from a coach looking to rebuild a tremendously shaky passing defense.

Perhaps that does more to answer the questions about the health of that trio than Day will himself at this point, casting aside any injury questions by differing to Ohio State's weekly availability report, which will drop Friday. Or, it could indicate increased confidence in the ability that Day feels his young defensive backfield has to handle itself moving forward after it was cast into the fire in week one against a strong Minnesota offense.

Leading the way in that bunch was true freshman cornerback Denzel Burke, who earned the starting nod in the top cornerback spot and acquainted himself well, drawing a pass interference early but finding his flow as the game went on and putting up a strong second half.

"Talk about getting throw to the fire. He's competed since he's got here. He deserved to start," Day said of Burke. "He's got to continue to grow. If he can learn from those mistakes, he'll have a chance to be a very good player."

Redshirt freshmen Ryan Watts and Lejond Cavazos saw action at cornerback as well in place of the injured veterans, while bullets Ronnie Hickman and Craig Young and safety Bryson Shaw provided depth in some of the other spots, with the latter serving as the likely solution at deep safety if Proctor isn't able to suit up for the Buckeyes this season.

Still, Day wasn't completely satisfied with his new group, which committed its fair share of penalties down the field and struggled against Minnesota's short passing game.

"I thought they competed. But were there mistakes? Absolutely," Day said. "Overall, there were some really good things. It certainly wasn't perfect. A lot of improvement needs to be made, and that has to happen."

With top 10 Oregon coming to town in less than a week's time, though, those young players have to make another big jump. The Ducks present a jump in competition from Minnesota and Day considers them one of the nation's best teams. Impressing in week one as a freshman and being prepared to suit up against Oregon are two very different cases, and the former will not be enough for Ohio State to accomplish the latter.

"I think that coach Cristobal is somebody who has a background (where he) brings a style of toughness to the table," Day said. "...This is a very, very good team that's coming in here."