

# Big Ten Football Media Days

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

## Ohio State Buckeyes

## Coach Ryan Day

### Press Conference



KEVIN WARREN: Our final head coach for our Football Media Days is an absolute leader on and off the field, an incredible football coach, and has made his imprint in a powerful fashion, not only in the Big Ten but across the country.

He and his wife Christina are very involved in On Our Sleeves to increase education, advocacy in regards to childhood mental health initiatives, and they even have started and created their own Ryan and Christina Day Fund at the Pediatric and Adolescent Mental Wellness Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. He's passionate about the mental health and wellness of everyone, but especially young people.

So it's good to have Coach Day here today. We're looking forward to a great season. So welcome to the podium the head football coach at The Ohio State University, Ryan Day.

RYAN DAY: Hi, everybody. Thank you, Commissioner Warren.

It's exciting to be here today. A lot going on right here in Big Ten land, and I want to congratulate Commissioner Warren on a great couple months here and leading this conference into the future.

A lot of people, I'm sure, had a hand in that, and I certainly want to tip my cap to all the presidents and athletic directors and everybody involved with it, but certainly Commissioner Warren being a big part of the expansion here of the conference.

I really want to thank the leadership of President Johnson and Gene Smith, two people who have had a huge impact on my career here in a short period of time, and they've done unbelievable things here at Ohio State and continue to do as we move into the future.

I think, as we look into this season, this exciting season for us, we have three guys here today, C.J. Stroud, Jaxon Smith-Njigba, and Ronnie Hickman, who really -- we could

have probably brought 10 or 15 different guys here today, but they really capture what we want as a player.

You start with Ronnie Hickman, this is a guy who's been through a lot of adversity at Ohio State, had some injuries but then played some really good football the last couple years, had a really good off-season, has had really good leadership. We're going to need that veteran leadership, especially early in the season as we kick off against Notre Dame here at home.

Jaxon Smith-Njigba had a tremendous year last year, had a really strong off-season. He's one of the more competitive men I've been around and a really strong off-season. All three of these guys have been named to our leadership committee.

Then C.J. Stroud, who last year really grew. Going into last year, it's amazing at this time he had not thrown a college football pass, grew as the season went on to a Heisman Trophy finalist.

This off-season, he's really had an edge to him. He's done a great job with his leadership. Because of that, we've had a really good off-season.

I think it's great to see a team come together. I think every coach will say they had a great off-season, so I'm not just going to fall in line. But I'm excited about what this team is, and I would kind of describe them as edgy this off-season.

We do start with Notre Dame early in the year. I want to thank Buckeye Nation because there's so much excitement around our program this year. That game and the last game, the rivalry game at the end of the year is already sold out. Our home schedule, I think there's only single tickets available right now. There's been a lot of excitement around that and a lot of excitement around this team.

As we head into the preseason, this will be an important preseason. We've got to start off the season well. We've got to play well in our first game, and that starts next week. With that, take any questions you guys have.



**Q. Ryan, expound on C.J. Stroud, though, just the way he's grown as a leader over the last year. Like you said, this time a year ago you hadn't even named him as a starter. Where has he really stepped up in that regard?**

RYAN DAY: C.J. has always had very good leadership skills. He's always had a voice. Once you go on the field and you show credibility that you can do it, you walk a little differently, and guys look at you through a different lens. I think that's been the case.

I think, when you're young and you go into a season and you haven't played, you're just trying to figure out a way to complete that first pass, get that first win, and you're so focused on your job and maybe the offense.

This off-season he's done a great job of taking a bunch of guys on defense over to his house. He's cooked for them. He's really approached it like a coach, and that's what leaders do, and that's what really good quarterbacks do. For a third year player to take that kind of approach has been great to see.

**Q. Your first three opponents this season, Notre Dame, Arkansas State, and Toledo, Ohio State has matched up a combined nine times against in history before this year. How does your preparation change when you look at teams like this versus ones you see all the time?**

RYAN DAY: You don't exactly know what you're going to get, especially with a new staff. You're not exactly sure what's going to happen. It's not like being in the eighth, ninth, tenth game in the year, into November, where you have a whole bunch of games, cut-ups to watch and expectations and tendencies.

So you have to focus on yourself. You have to focus on fundamentals and adjust in game and try to have contingency plans in place for those games.

**Q. In year one of the Jim Knowles era, so to speak, on defense, what are the expectations in year one? I'm sure improving isn't enough. You guys need to markedly improve. What are your thoughts on your expectations for the defense?**

RYAN DAY: First we have to play winning football, and that starts with stopping the run. I think that this off-season has been excellent in terms of them installing the defense, in terms of schematics. I think our new staff has done an excellent job, Jim with the linebackers, Perry with the safeties, Tim with the corners, and obviously Larry up front.

They come back with a lot of experience, almost the entire defense back, and really almost the entire Rose Bowl team is back from last year. So that's exciting. So we have a bit more experience there. So that part's good.

But new scheme, new coaches, all of those things are new. I think going up against them in the spring and seeing what's happened this summer and now into the preseason, it's been exciting to watch. There's just an aggressiveness about them.

But in terms of expectations, yeah, we expect a top ten defense. That's what we want. When we've played our best football, it's because we played really good defense, and we've been balanced and played complementary football.

We want to obviously stop the run to begin with and then go from there, but we expect a top ten defense.

**Q. Ryan, you said Jaxon's one of the more competitive guys you've seen. These guys are all competitive. What makes him different? Do you have any detail, or can you get into that a little bit?**

RYAN DAY: Well, he's not a real talkative guy, just in terms of on the field. He kind of keeps to himself, but when he says something, people listen. When he does speak, he's got a backbone. He's strong in what he says and his opinions, and he believes in hard work. He believes in toughness. If you watch the way he plays, he's tough.

Winning really matters to him. He tries to win every rep when he's out there. I've just been very impressed with the way he's practiced, the way he plays. He doesn't want to miss a rep. That's just the way he is. He's a no-nonsense kind of guy, and he doesn't stand for people making excuses. He doesn't stand for people not being accountable.

For somebody who isn't real talkative or loud, he does in his own way hold guys accountable. I think his competitiveness shows that way, and he leads by playing really, really hard. I think you saw that, especially in the last game, but you saw that in other games as well, just how hard he plays.

**Q. I want to ask about the offensive line. You've got a couple of new starters there this year. They did a pretty good job last year keeping C.J. clean in pass protection, but I know there were some concerns maybe with physicality in the run game. What are you going to do to bring that new offensive line around and develop some depth behind the starters as well?**

RYAN DAY: Those are areas of focus. Justin Frye's come in and done a really good job of talking about -- we're not changing things, but he does teach things different. He has a different style of coaching, a little bit different technique. So that's been great.

We have moved some different guys around. We lost Nick. We lost Thayer. But it's good to have those other guys back.

I'm really excited about the off-season that Dawand Jones has had. He's lost a bunch of weight. He's in really good shape. Same thing with Matt Jones. Donovan Jackson stepped up and had a really good off-season as well. Luke has been a leader, and Paris moves to left tackle. So that's a pretty good group right there.

Like you said, I don't know if it was the physicality in the run game or maybe the fits weren't right, but when we needed to at times, we didn't get it done. Other times we did. When you look at our numbers, they were very, very good, and we did run the ball when we needed to.

That balance is what we want. Certainly when you get to short yardage situations, big games, red zone, you've got to be able to run the ball at a high level, and that's going to be the focus. The offensive line, the tight ends have a big hand in that, the running backs, but also Coach Frye and the run game.

**Q. I know you made a big point of emphasis during the spring on leadership. You just talked about C.J.'s leadership in the summer. Players obviously have to take the initiative. What have you seen in terms of that for your team?**

RYAN DAY: So we really did an extensive study on how we wanted to handle leadership this year. We had two different periods where we elected a leadership committee, and those were different positions, different position groups, different classes. They were voted on by the team. We went through the spring, and then we revoted as we came back off of the break in May, and we really intermingled the team.

We tried to stay away from the position groups as much as we could, and I think that brought the team together a lot more. That forced guys into leadership positions. I think the thing that was neat was the first round of leadership was not the same round in the summer. So some guys maybe took a step back, some guys took a step up.

Now as we head into the summer, we kind of have an idea who the captains are going to be because we've already gone through it once. I think that's something we're going

to grab onto moving forward, and it's put guys in position to have a voice, and I'm hoping this pays off for us during the season.

**Q. To tag along a little bit to your previous question about opening with Notre Dame, probably the most highly anticipated opener in school history, at least by the fans, how has that impacted your players compared to other openers you've had both in the NFL and college, if any, or maybe not at all?**

RYAN DAY: No, it's been real. I think our guys feel it. I think they feel the excitement. I think they feel the anticipation. I think they just feel the community rally around this team.

But that first game being a night game is -- I mean, how else do you cut it? It's going to be electric, and our guys know that. So there's a little bit of urgency about them, and there's going to be this preseason.

Last year we started on the road at Minnesota, and that was a big conference game on the road with a very inexperienced team. So we had to play well in that game. That's similar this year. Now we're at home, a little bit more experienced team, but the plan's going to be the same. We've got to play really good football in that first game.

I think, when you look at our season, we have to have competitive stamina. We have to play really good at the beginning of the year, and we've got to play really good at the end of the year. That's the challenge of being Ohio State, you've got to win them all. So competitive stamina is one of the things we've been talking about as a team.

**Q. Kind of to piggy-back off my friend up there, opening up against Notre Dame and that ability that you talk about, what is that doing for your team? Also, in addition to that, with a guy like Marcus Freeman who went to Ohio State and played Ohio State, do you think that a team like Notre Dame should join the Big Ten Conference under the leadership of Freeman and just because of the buildup that you had this season?**

RYAN DAY: I think it's an exciting time for our fans, an exciting time for our team. It's obviously an exciting time for the Big Ten. Obviously the things that have gone on here in the last couple months. So I think it's a great opportunity to play against a really good opponent.

Marcus Freeman does a very, very good job. He's got a really good staff. They're very knowledgeable, very energetic, do a great job recruiting, do a great job schematically. It's going to be a really big challenge for us.

They have a great team coming into Ohio State.

All those things kind of have our guys' attention. So I think there is a little bit more attention to our guys just knowing what a big game we have to start the season off with.

**Q. Have you had some time to process the loss to the team up north last year? Just talk about how that has really catapulted you guys into the off-season as a motivating factor. And also just how good you feel about this team. It feels like you have something special brewing in Columbus this year.**

RYAN DAY: Every year the expectations are high, and that doesn't change based on what happened the year before. The expectation is to win them all. I said that in my opening press conference when I was named the head coach, and that's just the way it is.

Maybe at some places 11-2 with a Rose Bowl victory is a good year. It isn't at Ohio State. Our three goals are beat the team up north, win the Big Ten Championship, win the National Championship. That's our goals, and those things didn't happen last year.

It doesn't change next year or the year before. Just a different team with a different group of guys, more experienced. Again, when you think about those first few games last year, we had a lot of young guys, and now we've gone through a whole season and off-season together, I think our guys are a little scarred, they're a little calloused. They know what it's like to lose a game, and that's not fun. We remind our guys about that regularly, but we also know we have to move forward and focus on what's coming next.

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