

College Football Playoff

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Ohio State Buckeyes

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL
PLAYOFF

Q. You've been around a number of high-level quarterbacks. Just looking at Justin purely from the way he throws, if we can assume that he might not run as much on Monday night, how does he stack up with some of the best just pure passers you've been around?

KEVIN WILSON: You know, I've been around some guys and I've coached the position, although never having played quarterback I don't know if I'm an expert on the throw part of it.

I kind of -- I'd always dealt with quarterbacks as a guy that was a -- a golf-related guy who was more about what you see in your feet and how to process more than the throw.

So from a mechanical standpoint I really don't get on that. I know Ryan has kind of worked a lot with him through the off-season to continue to enhance his movement within the pocket and how to keep his eyes downfield and stay with his reads and have subtle movements and staying alive, because he is a really good athlete that can take off and move within the pocket and try to extend the play with the arm.

He can make a lot of throws, make a lot of great throws. He throws the deep ball. He not only has a big arm to throw the deep ball, but he's really, really accurate with the deep ball, and I think Ryan has done a tremendous job, he and Coach Dennis, of just trying to clean him up on the intermediate and make the high percentage throws more high, high percentage for him.

Had a great week of practice last week and off to a good start here this week, so we'll see how it goes. We've got a tremendous challenge with a tremendous defense, tremendous secondary, tremendous coverage with Coach Saban; Coach Golding is back now. We'll have our hands full for him throwing the ball, that's going to be for sure.

He also throws the ball when protection is good, and that

will be a challenge with Alabama, as well. But he can make all the throws, and at the same time as talented he is I think he's scratching the surface. He has a bright, bright future in this game.

Q. When you came in with Ryan, what did he and you envision for this offense? Obviously you were brought in by Urban to make some changes. You had never worked with Ryan before, at least I don't think. Where did sort of your philosophies meld? What was his vision? What was your vision? And, again, what was the evolution that you guys were looking to sort of take place on Ohio State's offense?

KEVIN WILSON: You know, I think with his background having played in a similar offense that in time, you know, my background being older, it went from the original I-formation, Midwest offenses that were ran -- my college coach came from the Mid-American-conference, Dick Crum from Ohio, and when he went to North Carolina he ran the sprint draw and the power and the counter and the fullback belly and the toss and the power pass and sprint draw pass and counter boot and old fashioned I-formation plays, and we did that, and in time the only reason why we changed when we went to Northwestern in the 2000 season was just a need of not having tight ends that led to the evolution of running this offense.

Well, Coach Day's coordinator at New Hampshire was Chip Kelly. Me and Chip had crossed paths through a mutual friend, James Patton, and got to know Chip when he was coaching at Rhode Island. Chip was New Hampshire, now we're at Northwestern, so we visited. I think Chip kind of ran with it his way. We were kind of running with it our way in the spread. Over time I was the offensive line guy, background guy that had a little bit of quarterback play, but Ryan is a pure quarterback guy.

But I think him being around his background at Boston College and his background being around some of the coaches that he had, a couple stints there with Coach O'Brien and Coach Addazio where he had some really good line background head coaches.

So I think Ryan is a skill guy that understands line play. I'm a ling guy that knows a little bit about skill play. Not a lot,

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but a little bit.

And I think we have similar views but slightly different but they're cohesive in that we're playing through the spread game.

When we came here it wasn't like we were putting ideas in. We were learning what Coach Meyer wanted us to do, period. We learned that style of offense and what the language was and the way he wanted to operate and getting the ball to Paris Campbell, and at the time we had J.K. and Mike Weber throwing the ball and what J.T. Barrett could do with the line.

Over time, with Haskins in the passing game it evolved a little bit the next year, but that initial year we got here was really just trying to be a great teammate and be a part of what Coach Meyer would always say is the Ohio State offense.

Over time each year the Ohio State offense has evolved a little bit, and in Ryan's time and with him we've changed a little, but really we haven't gotten away from trying to be physical, run the ball, score touchdowns in the scoring zone, take care of the football.

So, you know, our vision never changed because we never got away from the core values. When I was at Ohio -- excuse me, Northwestern years ago and we changed to the spread, we never got away from the core values that Randy Walker wanted. We were going to run the ball, we were going to try to be physical, we were going to take care of the quarterback, we were going to win the turnover battle, we were going to win the field position battle, play good defense, kick the ball well. Those are the same things we try to do here at Ohio State, and those will be things we try to do Monday night, because that's going to be the key to winning.

We've been able to morph and evolve, but it really just started what Coach Meyer wanted, and since that time we've kind of played to the strength of our players more than things that Coach Day or I or anybody wants to do.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Patrick Surtain. He's maybe the best defensive player in the country, and just wondered what challenges he poses to you guys and what you have in your bag of tricks to try to neutralize that guy?

KEVIN WILSON: Well, you know, his thing is of course he can do many different things with their coverages and adjustments, but in reality he's such a great cover guy that basically you put an X on that guy because he's covered up a lot.

And that being said, he doesn't need to have a lot of safety help or bracket help or inside help. He can play a guy one-on-one, so that allows the defense to then bracket other receivers or that allows the defense then to cheat with linebackers and safeties to outnumber you and out-gap you in the run game.

I mean, he's a tremendous player. A guy we recruited hard. I know Coach Coombs was disappointed when we didn't get half and those guys were dealing trying to get him in here. I think it was just Coach Coombs back then. But he's a tremendous player. He's athletic. He's long. He's going to do a great job.

Doing his part in helping a very, very strong defense do well. I'm sure there's going to be some reads where the ball is going to go that way because Justin is going to fill the match-up. We have good receivers that goes through that guy. But he's one of the best players in college football and has a great future playing defensive back. He's one of the premier defenders, and he'll have a great career, not only in college but moving forward.

Q. You gave us a good -- sort of a good lineage of your offensive past going back to Dick Crum. Where does your '07-'08 no-huddle stuff fit in there? How much of what you did in Norman in those two years tie in with any of the stuff you're doing now or that really anybody is doing in this offensive world we live in?

KEVIN WILSON: Yeah, we didn't want to go, didn't plan to go no-huddle when we were at Northwestern, but back then we were studying what Coach Rodriguez did. We were trying to find something, because we did not have tight ends and fullbacks. We did it in a spread set because that's what everyone did. I was fortunate enough to get hired by Coach Stoops to come to Oklahoma, and we fiddled around my first year or so a little bit in some practices with Coach Long, but it really didn't fit the terminology we had at the time and really didn't fit our guys.

We were playing really, really good back then. That's in -- as a matter of fact, that was the team actually played Coach Saban's team in 2002, and then the 2003 team that played in Sugar Bowl.

So we didn't really come to it until the 2008 year when Sam was coming back, Bob came in the off-season and said, I think we need to look at no-huddle. I said, Coach, if you want to we need to change a couple things the way we practice, because you've got to practice a certain way and I don't know if that fits the way you want to do things defensively.

I remember he had Coach Snyder came down that year from K-State. He was out of coaching at that time and did a clinic, and I met with Coach Snyder and I said, Coach, I'm struggling because Coach Stoops wants to go no-huddle and I think that might mess us up because we're really pretty good on defense. What do you think?

And he says, Well, because you've got a good offense I think you're going to get more at bats. What we were able to do Jermaine Gresham, Brody Eldridge, a phenomenal player, Matt Clapp, we were able to then start doing no-huddle with personnel groupings where were weren't spread out all the time or it wasn't quarterback run game all the time.

We were able to add the Mike Leach style passing that we had continued to do that Mike had brought in there in '99. We were add that with some really string tight end play with Jermaine and Brody. We had a really good offensive line. Trent Williams and Phil Loadholt and Duke Robinson and John Cooper. I mean, we had some good players. Manny Johnson and Joaquin. We had DiMarco and Chris Brown dotting the I back there, so some good players. But the deal was, I remember talking to Herbstreit preseason, he said, You guys are going to be good. I said, Kirk, I don't want to say anything until after we get by this game in the middle of October, but I think we're going to go no-huddle with this multiple-personnel groupings. I think we can mess with some people. Now the game has caught -- defenses have caught up, but I think from that's from there where the RPOs started coming in, the multiple personnel groupings, offense has continued to grow.

There's still some great defenses, but you're going to see two strong defenses playing against two pretty really strong offenses on Monday night, and that's kind of where the game has evolved. Even the pro game where guys are scoring 35, 40, 40-some points now.

Q. A lot has been said about Justin's guts and taking the shot to the ribs during that game against Clemson. I wonder if you could portray from your perspective how that went with him playing with it. And then what was the difference between what Northwestern did to you guys and why Justin and the offense prospered so much against Clemson?

KEVIN WILSON: Different defenses. I mean, Northwestern is -- they played well in in their bowl game against Auburn. I think they won like 35 to 18 or 19. They had a really good season. They're a little bit different, not as multiple with pressures or looks as Clemson, but Coach Hankwitz is in own way different, but great coordinator and had a great run up there.

So they were able to keep the ball in front of them. We had a couple receivers out that maybe threw our timing out a little bit of whack. I think as much as anything, after a couple losses it just looked like last week Coach Day was able to -- the last two weeks prior to that Clemson game was able to Justin to settle down and get his eyes back where they need to be and not force plays and take what's there and trust what's there, and we were able to have some success in the running game.

As the running game got going well, he was able to complement the pass game and that was that game. This is a different game. It's going to be hard to run on these guys. They're strong and stout and keep our balance, but we've got to find a way to keep the chains on schedule and try to find a way to get some 1st downs and try to find a way to get Justin going.

In the game when he took the hit it was a big hit, and all we thought after that was if he could go we needed to be very smart, because we're going to do a bunch of QB runs after that. He was able to, I guess, come back and play. I don't know the conversations that he and Coach Day had. We just tried to be really smart with the decisions we put -- we still were able to throw the ball.

I think he showed a year ago he took a pretty good hit and took a low injury in a rivalry game up north and came out and made one of the best plays of his life the next play after coming off that deal.

So he's been able to fight through some adversity and he's a very good player and he's a tough player, and just -- I think that's just his DNA and his makeup it looks like.

Q. Offensive lines need cohesion, and you guys have not had that luxury with the COVID situation that you've had. How have you been able, you and Stud, to be able to counteract that, and how important is the same kind of performance that you had against Clemson going to be against Alabama?

KEVIN WILSON: I don't know, I mean, we missed some of those games with the -- we lose the Maryland game, then we lose our Illinois game, and then we lose our rival game, so we're kind of going every other week.

This has always been a great practice outfit. Our Tuesdays and Wednesdays, a lot of good-on-good, whether it be individual periods, group periods, inside run periods, team periods. And that being said, sometimes our second team players, we do a lot of twos on ones, and sometimes our second team players are playing against some of the best players in the country in practice.

We had a game where we had a couple linemen out, but to me I wasn't really overly concerned about that game. I knew we had some talented players coming, they had been practicing well. So I actually think -- I mean, I don't think you run the ball the way we've been running in a team that's not an option-oriented team and don't have pretty good line play and cohesion.

And I think it's also complemented by a couple really good tight ends that no one wants to talk about unless they catch a ball. Them guys touch their butts off every week. So it's a solid front. Is it a great, great phenomenal line? I don't know about that, but they're really good. They're great kids. They give us great practice habits. They're talented. We work really hard to try to put them in good schemes. It's hard because every team is out-gapping you.

Tough thing in college ball, one week it's this scheme, then it's that scheme. Every week it's different schemes. But Coach Stud does a great job. Those linemen are really playing solid to me. You don't know if it's a good line until the end of the year and you can look back and see what you did.

So we'll wait until Monday night to see how good a line it is, and they're going to get their strongest test Monday night with Alabama's front because they're the best we've seen. But I've got a lot of respect for Coach Stud. I've got a lot of respect for the O-line, and I appreciate that our group at tight end can complement and help those guys.

And then with that, Trey makes the plays, Justin makes the plays. But without those cats up front, it wouldn't be the offense that we have.

Q. Seven of the last eight games Alabama has played, statistically their defense has been pretty good. I'm curious what you've seen they've done well that stands out, and on the flipside, with the success Florida and Ole Miss had moving the ball, what can you take away from that as you strategize?

KEVIN WILSON: Yeah, the Ole Miss game is early and I think it looks like as they've been able to play -- one of the best ways to get better is by playing. I think that's why we played pretty well the other night. We finally got to game 6, game 7, game 8. Typically that's when we'd have like a -- one of our Big Ten road or home games that middle third, second, third, fourth week of October, big game. That's kind of where last week was in our calendar of games the way the schedule fell this year.

I think Alabama has gotten better because they've been able to play, play in a great league against great players

every week. I know Florida got hot and I think got into a little bit of a shootout. Credit to Florida to making some plays and keeping some drives extended.

But to me, I haven't played Alabama in quite a while. You watch them -- I've always watched Coach Saban's teams. Shoot, I think the first year we competed against him was like '90, '91 at Miami of Ohio when he was at Toledo or something like 1990 I think it was, and he was the head coach up there. Crossed his path at Michigan State, as well. Crossed him at LSU, and now here we are seeing his Alabama team.

They're a great defense with talent, length. They're going to make it unbelievably challenging. I just think as they've played they've gotten better and better, and you can skew the numbers and statistically we can always make offenses and defenses look better than they are or worse than they are. The key things is the great teams do what it takes to win every week, and that's what their defense does and that's what Coach Saban has done as well as anyone that's ever coached the game of football.

Q. I was talking to some people about Thayer Munford the other night and they were mentioning this meeting you and Stud had with him late in the recruiting process. You were having him go through some offensive stuff. What do you remember about that meeting and just what perspective do you have now on the accomplishment of him getting to Ohio State, getting through his career but then also the season he's had?

KEVIN WILSON: I had gotten hired a couple weeks, and I don't know the issue with why we were taking -- I don't know if we had lost someone or someone had left or transferred -- but all of a sudden we wanted to take one more lineman. We were going back and forth, and Thayer as I think a junior, I think is when I remember seeing Thayer myself as a sophomore when I went and watched a practice when his head coach was at Massillon when they were over at LaSalle at the time down in Cincinnati. As a matter of fact, our punter, Drew Christian, was there, and he said, Coach, I've got a good punter, and Drew punted one across the field over the press box. I'll never forget that. I was like, geez, I've never seen a guy kick it over the press box.

But Thayer, I remember Thayer as a young player, and Coach Meyer wanted me to go up to this meeting with Stud because I have a linebacker background to give my opinion. So we get down, ask him, hey, let me see you, let's watch a little tape with you, talk some ball, tell me what you know, draw a play. His coach had him get in a stance and all that stuff. I looked at Stud and go, what's wrong

with this guy.

And at the same time because I had just gotten here, I'm afraid, well if I put my stamp on this guy as a thumbs up and he's a flop, it's like I don't know what I'm talking about, but the whole time, I'm like, what's wrong with this guy; this guy is going to be an elite player. I know he was a three-star recruit, but I thought he had a great -- I just thought he was going to be awesome.

Credit to him, though. He's the guy that stayed healthy. He's the guy that's worked hard to stay in shape. He's the guy that's gotten stronger. So Thayer himself has made himself into a great player.

But I remember that first meeting there was some hemming and hawing by a lot of people and should we, and I'm glad we had the meeting. It was very quick for me to think he had a chance. Doesn't mean he's going to make it. He's made it because Thayer and his family and everyone has backed him and we've had great support here, but I do remember that meeting specifically in the Massillon -- it was a little basketball game they were having up at Massillon. I remember specifically Coach Meyer, me and Coach Stud sitting there one day with him.

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