# Ohio State getting back to basics with playoff hopes revived

BY MARCUS HARTMAN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio State was left for dead after consecutive double-digit losses to USC and Oregon to end October and begin November.

Coach Ryan Day's team rebounded to beat Northwestern 28-19 last weekend, but that seemed like too little, too late for a team that also lost to Texas early in the season.

Then the newest edition of the College Football Playoff Committee rankings were released Tuesday night.

The Buckeyes (7-3, 5-2 Big Ten), who are 16th in the AP Top 25, rose six spots in the CFP rankings to No. 14 going into Saturday's game at Nebraska.

They are one spot behind Oregon, who is also 7-3, but both teams suddenly look like they could find their way into the final 12-team CFP field if they keep winning and get some help via upsets of teams ahead of them.

"Coach Day just told us to take it one week at a time," defensive end Qua Russaw said Wednesday night. "Just control what we can control. I mean, there's nothing really we can do about who they decide to put in, but just controlling what we can control each and every week."

The Buckeyes beat the Wildcats by going back to basics. Ohio State ran for 168 yards, and freshman quarterback Luke Fahey looked more comfortable with that to lean on.

He wasn't flawless, but Fahey said afterward the game was slowing down for him, especially before the snap.

Day appreciated how he was able to execute some plays he had not made in previous games, most notably completing an out pattern for a touchdown to Devin McCuin that had gone incomplete on a key fourth down a week earlier.

Fahey also did a better job getting the ball to star receiver Jeremiah Smith, who was targeted 17 times and caught 11 passes for 117 yards and a touchdown against the Wildcats.

On the other side of the ball, Ohio State returned to playing more four-man fronts and basic coverages after having trouble getting lined up and executing coordinator Matt Patricia's calls against the Ducks and Trojans.

"It's just about playing ball, playing Buckeye football," offensive lineman Ian Moore said about getting back into the CFP race. "We know that to be able to get back into this thing, we've got to dominate, and that's really the only word. It's just you've got to dominate because we want to play in this thing."

If any team knows about coming off the mat in the fight for a spot in the postseason, it's Ohio State.

The Buckeyes rose from as low as No. 16 in the CFP rankings to make the field as the No. 4 seed in 2014. In 2022, they benefited from multiple upsets on conference championship weekend to make the field as the No. 4 seed. Going back farther, they made the 2007 BCS National Championship game despite being ranked No. 7 in the penultimate rankings.

This week the challenge is to go to Nebraska (6-4, 3-4). Then the Buckeyes will return home to face Michigan in the traditional season finale for both teams.

The Cornhuskers and Wolverines both have formidable defenses, and Michigan knows a thing or two about upsetting the Buckeyes even when seasons aren't going as planned for the Wolverines.

"I think the first thing is all that matters is winning these two games," Day said. "The guys understand that part of it, and then we're gonna need some help.

"We know that, but my message to the team is, 'Yeah, we gotta win the two games.' That's the most important thing, but also the committee and people, they're watching everything. They're watching offense, they're watching defense, they're watching special teams — so everything we do matters."



JAY LAPRETE/Associated Press

**Ohio State defensive lineman James Smith celebrates s a sack against Northwestern during the 28-19 win last week. The Buckeyes moved up six spots in the College Football Playoff rankings this week.**

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