

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Ohio State Buckeyes

Men's Head Coach

Chris Holtmann



THE MODERATOR: Please welcome to the stage from the Ohio State University Head Coach Chris Holtmann. Coach Holtmann is preparing for his seventh season in Columbus with the Buckeyes.

Coach, welcome. We'll begin with your opening statement.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: It's great to be with you guys again here in Minneapolis. It's obviously great to be here. It will be great to be back for the Big Ten Tournament.

I have no doubt this will be another highly entertaining Big Ten season in what I believe is clearly the deepest, deepest conference in college basketball. So I'm excited about another really fun challenging year.

For us it's the celebration of 125 years of Ohio State basketball, and as always, we look forward to representing all those that came before us, all the teams and coaches and phenomenal players that have come before us. As many of you know that followed us, last year we had our struggles until the very end, and we certainly have a lot to prove. I know we're all looking forward to that opportunity here this year.

We have a group that consists of six returning players, as well as three transfers and a four-man freshman class. We'll certainly be led by that group of returning players, fourth-year player Zed Key, as well as that trio of returning sophomores, Bruce Thornton, Roddy Gayle, Felix Okpara. So we are really excited about those guys continuing off some of the really fine moments they had later in the year last year and can't wait to get started.

I'll take questions.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open the floor for questions.

Q. After losing Brice last year and some other guys that were pretty ball-heavy, or prominent offensively, do you have a little bit of a feel for the preseason here of what this offense might look like?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, I do. I think we spent a lot of time in the offseason looking at some of our offensive numbers, and the reality is we were not, particularly in Big Ten play, good enough offensively in a number of ways. Our numbers overall on the year, as you know, were good, but in Big Ten play they were not good enough.

We were not efficient enough like we had been really the bulk of our time at Ohio State. So we made some adjustments, and I think we've got a group that in some ways there's an element where you lose a guy that has the ability to kind of go get a bucket at any time that presents some challenges and then it's also going to present some opportunities for some other guys.

Q. You bring in three transfer players, and obviously the hope is that they're going to be productive members of your team, veterans, leaders even though they haven't been in your program. Just if you could go through each of those three guys and how you kind of envision what you want to see out of them? It sounds like Mahaffey has been a good addition from the limited bit that we're getting.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: You have an insider source there, Steve.

We are really pleased with the three transfers that we have. They've had a really good summer and fall, and I think as every coach will come up here and talk about how excited he is about his team, but I really think that those three guys are going to have a real significant impact on this group.

You mentioned Evan. Evan is the youngest of the group. Evan has just spent a year in college, so he is a sophomore, and I think he is a growing, developing player.

Dale Bonner gives us really something that we haven't had maybe in our entire time at Ohio State in terms of his quickness, his ability to shoot the ball and how dynamic he can be. It just gives us a different element. Certainly you can play he and Bruce together, and we plan to do that pretty consistently.



Then Jamison Battle is obviously a proven multi-dimensional wing, guard-forward who has been able to score in the Big Ten for the past couple of seasons. So we're excited about his shooting and scoring that he is going to provide.

Q. They're not here yet, but the four former Pac-12 schools that are on their way, what do you think they add to the basketball product in the Big Ten?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, I'm excited about it. I really am. I think our league is positioned as well as any league in the country, and I think all those schools bring a different element. They're all going to be really exciting places to play for our guys to go and experience playing at some of those venues that are as iconic as there are in college basketball.

They're all programs that have experienced certainly highs and lows, but you look at a program like UCLA, and they've had a phenomenal last couple of years there with Mick. So I think it's a really good thing for our league. I couldn't be more excited. I think I speak for most coaches.

You know, the question that's come up a lot is the scheduling and how that impacts sports like ours, but I know that we have an incredible crew at the Big Ten that I think will take all that into account. There will be some challenges with it, but it's well worth whatever challenges are going to come.

Q. Just curious going into an offseason like this after a season like you had, what were kind of things you were hoping to accomplish in the offseason, and was there anything in particular that you got excited about that happened this offseason?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, you know because you've been around, Aaron, when you go through a season like that, I think you're looking for really the work, the daily work of your guys and what that looks like. That's been led by -- I think Bruce has led the way there.

The consistency of his work and his approach I think has been a really good thing to see, and it's also certainly been contagious, but that's the first thing you're looking for is, do we have the daily work and the edge that's required coming off of some struggles?

And I really do look at those struggles -- and we were talking a little bit about it last night. When you go through struggles like that, what you really hope is that you have guys returning who have those scars, that scar tissue, and that can remember those moments because I think that really provides beneficial things moving forward. That's

what we get to see this year.

Q. How do your conversations in the portal change when you are looking for a piece, not necessarily "the" piece?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: It's a good question. I think for us that was a conversation, right? When you have a young group of players, you can go out and recruit kind of the player, but for us we were looking for guys that we felt like could certainly make an impact, but could also allow these sophomores in particular to grow, so you are having that conversation.

All three of the transfers are going to play a really important role and a significant role. I really believe that. But we also wanted to balance that with the idea that these three sophomores that we have need to continue to grow and flourish as players.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Holtmann, thank you so much for your time.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Thank you so much for covering our league. Thank you.

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