

Buckeyes Poised to Bounce Back



Following a tough loss to No. 6 Michigan State at home, the No. 16 Ohio State men's basketball team needs to bounce back quickly with formidable Big Ten opponents looming.

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann told his players he wishes he could have done a better job for his players down the stretch in the loss to the Spartans. With the loss in the rearview, Holtmann is only concerned with moving forward.

"I think it begins with an awareness that this is life in a power conference, this is life in league play," Holtmann said. "You're going to go through some serious bumps and bruises, and so I think it begins with that. There's just a reality that that's going to happen.

"And then I think one of the things that made last year's group so significant in that regard was our leadership was outstanding in response to a loss. And I think this group has the potential for that as well, but we'll see."

The Buckeyes shocked many experts with a 25-9 season and a second-place finish in the Big Ten when they were supposed to be near the bottom of the conference last season. Ohio State only lost consecutive games twice during the 2017-2018 campaign and did not lose more than two in a row.

After losing veteran leaders Keita Bates-Diop, Jae'Sean Tate, Kam Williams and Andrew Dakich, the Buckeyes look to rebound from their loss to the Spartans with a younger, less experienced team.

Sophomore forward Kyle Young said age does not determine someone to be a leader. The 6-8 forward from Canton, Ohio, is eager to correct any mistakes with his eyes locked in on improvement.

"The coaches do a good job of making it a point that leaders are guys who step in and teach others and help to make the team better," Young said. "The earlier the better, just so that we learn these important values, can help our team get better with every day, so the better we're going to be."

Freshman guard Luther Muhammad has only played 13 games at the collegiate level, but the Newark, N.J., native ranks third on the team in scoring and second in minutes. Already in his young career Muhammad has grasped the importance of remaining level-headed and not allowing anything to divide the team.

"Every game you're going to go through ups and downs, go through adversity," Muhammad said. "And when you're going through that, you've got to stay together. You can't get distant from each other. You've got to encourage each other and stay as one, stay as a unit."

Holtmann understands that the team lost a strong core of leaders from last season, but remains optimistic this year's group will bond together as a whole.

"I think as you get into league play, we'll go as far as our collective leadership takes us and I really believe that," Holtmann said. "And I'm excited about seeing that continue to grow within this group."

Young, who averages 7.6 points at a 71.7 percent clip, shared a similar sentiment as his coach and emphasized the importance of learning from mistakes and leaving those mishaps in the past.

"I definitely think we're going in the right direction. Within all the players and all the coaches, we all have really strong trust in each other. And just coming in, working every day and being consistent, you're going to keep building that."

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