

E.J. Liddell Declares For Draft, Will Sign Agent



Ohio State forward E.J. Liddell's career in Columbus has come to a close. After three seasons with the Buckeyes, the Illinois native has declared for the NBA draft and will be signing an agent, signaling the end of his career in the scarlet and gray following a season that landed Liddell on the All-Big Ten first-team and the AP All-America third-team.

"I am going to start this off by thanking Buckeye Nation," Liddell wrote in a release shared on Twitter. "These past three years have given me some of the best moments of my life. Being able to have our fans back in the Schott made this year extra fun!

"Thanks to my family and friends for always being there through the highs and lows. I love you with all my heart. To my teammates, I appreciate you all - we have built a bond that will never be broken. The times we spent together will never be forgotten and I'm grateful to call you all my brothers.

"Choosing to play for coach (Chris) Holtmann has been the best decision for me not only as a player but as a person. Thank you for believing in me, coach. To our trainers, managers and the rest of our coaching staff, I appreciate you all for allowing, me to carry on the great traditions and culture of being a Buckeye. Most importantly, thank you God for everything. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

"I will cherish the time and commitment of Buckeye Nation. I hope the feeling is mutual! With that, I'd like to announce that I will be hiring an agent and entering the 2022 NBA Draft."

Liddell led the Buckeyes in scoring, rebounding and blocking this season out of the power forward slot, pitching in 19.4 points on 49 percent shooting (37.4 percent from 3-point range), 7.9 rebounds and 2.6 blocks per game to earn a nod among the finalist for the Karl Malone Award, which goes to the nation's top power forward. The Buckeyes finished the season at 20-12 with a Round of 32 loss to Villanova on March 20, 71-61.

"I'm really excited for EJ as he begins his NBA career," Holtmann said in a release. "He has developed

and grown significantly as a player every single year as a Buckeye, and that will continue to be the case as an NBA player. E.J. has represented our program at the highest level with his excellent play, leadership and of course, his trademark smile. E.J. will always be a Buckeye. We love you, my man.”

After eschewing the draft a season ago to return to Columbus for one more season, Liddell has seen his draft stock skyrocket. Thanks to a more balanced, perimeter-centric game, he’s largely considered a first-round prospect and was tabbed as the No. 18 pick in ESPN’s most recent mock draft. He was recognized on Ohio State’s senior day and has been considered a sure-thing to depart for months.

The question for OSU turns now to freshman point guard Malaki Branham, who was slotted in at No. 16 in that same mock draft and whose plans moving forward remain in the air. Super seniors forward Justice Sueing and Seth Towns and senior guard Justin Ahrens have decisions to make regarding their status next season as well. The latter was recognized on senior day, the former two were not.

Ohio State acknowledged seven players with that event: Ahrens, Liddell and super senior forward Kyle Young, as well as the quartet of transfers in Joey Brunk, Cedric Russell, Jimmy Sotos and Jamari Wheeler. The Buckeyes are set to welcome a five-man recruiting class into the fold and will shape their transfer portal strategy around those remaining decisions.