

Former Ohio State Guard Branham Emerging Late In Rookie Season



In his first season in the NBA, former Ohio State guard Malaki Branham's campaign has followed a similar arc to his lone year with the Buckeyes.

After a relatively slow start for the San Antonio Spurs, Branham has emerged over the past two months while seeing increases in scoring, shooting efficiency and playing time under legendary NBA head coach Gregg Popovich. Through 54 games this season, Branham has averaged 9.5 points and 2.5 rebounds per game, shooting 44.5 percent from the field and 31.6 percent from the three-point range, while the Spurs hold an 18-52 record — among the worst in the NBA.

It took some time for Branham to fit into San Antonio's rotation as the former Buckeye played in just seven of the Spurs' first 20 games while shooting 20.7 percent across those outings. But from late November onward, Branham became a mainstay on the court for the Spurs, primarily operating off the bench.

Branham notched his first 20-point outing on Dec. 26, 2022, hitting 7 of 11 field goal attempts while leading the Spurs to a four-point win over the Utah Jazz. The Columbus native continued his inconsistent play from there, however, and entering February of his rookie season, Branham averaged just 7.1 points while shooting 41.2 percent, including a 27.7 percent mark from deep. But, Branham completely turned things around from there.

Branham eclipsed 20 points in back-to-back outings, producing 22 and 26 in losses to the Sacramento Kings and Philadelphia 76ers in the first games of February, before scoring just 15 and 4 points against the Chicago Bulls and Toronto Raptors on Feb. 6 and Feb. 8. But, Branham responded to his two-game dip in a big way, scoring a career-high 27 points, while shooting 7 of 10 from deep, in a loss to the Detroit Pistons on Feb. 10.

The former Buckeye added a pair of 23-point performances on Feb. 15 and Feb. 23 in losses to the

Charlotte Hornets and Dallas Mavericks.

Throughout February, Branham led all rookies in scoring by producing 16.8 points per game on 50.0 percent shooting, including a 38.6 percent mark from three-point range, but the Spurs spent much of the month in the midst of a 16-game losing streak. Due to the Spurs' struggles, Branham was passed up for the Western Conference Rookie of the Month award, with the NBA giving it to Utah's Walker Kessler.

Branham has been fairly up-and-down in March, averaging 10.5 points while shooting 44.6 percent, but produced 18 and 20 points in San Antonio's last two outings on March 15 and 17.

As the former No. 20 overall pick has found his footing late in the regular season, Branham has left many in San Antonio satisfied with the selection.