

Freshman Forward Devin Royal In Line For More Playing Time With Buckeyes



Ohio State has been searching for answers on how to improve its team throughout the majority of Big Ten play this season, especially on the offensive end. After a convincing start in nonconference play, the Buckeyes' offense has fizzled out since the start of the New Year, with the team reaching 70 or more points in just four of their last nine games.

Luckily for Chris Holtmann's team, Ohio State may be receiving a spark on that end of the floor from true freshman forward Devin Royal, who has seen an uptick in minutes across the last two weeks of conference play. Despite the Buckeyes dropping four games in a row, the Pickerington Central product has emerged as a key frontcourt contributor for the team on both ends of the floor, where he has averaged 6.7 points and 2.0 rebounds across his last three games in 38 total minutes of play.

Royal's emergence in the paint was perhaps most evident in Ohio State's last contest against Iowa on Friday, where he logged a season-high 17 minutes and imposed his will inside the paint with three bruising layups in the first half along with three rebounds.

Speaking with the media on Monday, Holtmann said that Royal has earned the extra minutes with his play and hard-working mentality in practice, where he thinks the freshman has made the most strides in terms of his overall confidence and ability to defend across the court.

"I'm really pleased with Devin," Holtmann said. "He's had a great approach here, really for a month and a half in practice. He's learning how to guard different positions. That's been the biggest challenge, as it is for every freshman. In high school, he guarded bigger guys. They weren't as big as they are at this level, but still bigger guys.

"He's been committed to getting better in that area, and now he's playing with confidence. And we've been able to find some spots for him to feel some success offensively. But the credit to him has been his work and his consistency of his work."

Holtmann specifically pointed to Royal's improvements on defense as something that has given the freshman more minutes. The coach said that while Royal may not have been required to defend outside of the post during his time at Pickerington Central — where he led the program to back-to-back Division I state title game appearances as a junior and senior — he has made the necessary adjustments to become more of a versatile defender at the collegiate level, a shift that he mentioned is difficult for many first-years to make.

"I think the defensive piece of some of it, like any freshman, has been the biggest learning curve for him," Holtmann said. "But man, he's had a great approach, great attitude. He's working hard. He's earned these minutes. And it makes a coach really happy to see a kid who's earned these minutes in practice now play well in the game. I'm just really proud of him and excited for him, excited for his growth, because he has a lot of potential."

Royal described the acclimation period to the college game as a "process," in a Zoom call with the media before the team departed to Iowa on Thursday. But despite these lumps, the freshman said that he has begun to embrace this increased role with the team, something that may only increase as the season progresses.

"It's just a process," he said. "Me being a freshman, it's a process getting minutes, getting more time. So for me, it's just keep working. I've always worked my whole life, so just keep working and strive for better."

"I feel happy, just excited to be able to provide for our team," he added. "I know I just have to be doing it more consistently so I'm able to come in any time during the game and do that."