

Holtmann Encouraged By Ohio State's Energy But Points To Several Areas Of Needed Improvement After Loss To Northwestern



During the recent stretch, in which Ohio State has lost 10 of its last 11 games, head coach Chris Holtmann and forward Zed Key have touched on the need to start games with more “bite and fight.”

The Buckeyes did just that against Northwestern, as players dove for loose balls, ran in transition and moved the ball with more efficiency — tallying five assists in the first 8:06 of game action — while Ohio State kept pace with the Wildcats for the entire first half. Although head coach Chris Holtmann was encouraged by Ohio State’s effort against the Wildcats, he noted that there are still several areas that the Buckeyes need to improve in to get out of the current funk.

“I do think we had that (bite) and I thought we’ve had that the last couple of games,” Holtmann said. “We’ll look at that moving forward, but I do think last night in particular we did have a good bite to us early and you’d expect that at home.

“Again, there are just too many pockets that we have to improve,” he continued. “I thought there were some really good possessions throughout the game. I thought there were some excellent things looking back and seeing it on film, that were really good. But, obviously areas we need to improve in.”

While the Buckeyes have faced trying times over the past month, a span that includes a pair of five-game losing streaks, Holtmann noted that he felt his squad played some of their best basketball in stretches against the Wildcats, but added that there needs to be sustainability in regard to maintaining that level of play.

“I did think last night, we had as good of play in stretches as we’ve had, here at least recently,” Holtmann said. “I just thought we played really hard, competed at a really high level in terms of playing hard. I thought the ball moved well, but you look at some stretches of the game where we just weren’t able to get enough stops or convert on some free throws or make an open look.

“As much as anything, you focus on trying to clean those things up and get better in those areas.”

Ohio State outplayed the Wildcats in several areas, as the Buckeyes shot a 50.0 percent clip and out-rebounded Northwestern 35-24 while also carving out a noted advantage in the paint with a 34-20 advantage. However, the Buckeyes also turned the ball over 15 times, shot 1 of 14 from three-point range, and missed eight free throws during the second half of the loss.

Although Ohio State showcased its ability in several key areas, it still wasn't enough to put an end to another prolonged losing stretch and Holtmann said the grind to improve in necessary areas continues with any other Big Ten battle against Michigan State on the horizon Sunday.

“When your margin of error is pretty small when you're playing a good team, we just weren't able to convert at the free throw line like we needed to,” Holtmann said. “But looking back at the film, it was kind of what we felt like watching it, I thought our effort was really good and I thought our ability to improve in some of those areas was good, we just have to keep taking strides.”