

Holtmann 'Excited About The Future' Of Ohio State Basketball As 2022 Class Enters The Fray



When a coach signs the No. 6 recruiting class in Division I college basketball and the top-ranked class in their conference, that coach can praise themselves and their coaching staff for a job well done.

That's what Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann did on Thursday when he discussed the class of 2022 — the highest-rated class the Buckeyes have signed under Holtmann — with Tim Hall on 97.1 The Fan's The Buckeye Show.

"I think we're really excited about this class. We're excited about the future," Holtmann said. "We're excited about what this young group can be and the coming years. When you have four guys in the top 60 in the country that all play a different position and meet real needs for us, it's exciting to work with guys that we believe have bright futures in Buckeye uniforms."

Ohio State's incoming freshmen include four-star recruits Roddy Gayle Jr. of Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy, Bruce Thornton of Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton High School, Felix Okpara of Branson (Mo.) Link Academy and Brice Sensabaugh of Orlando (Fla.) Lake Highland Prep. The Buckeyes also signed Cincinnati Princeton three-star Bowen Hardman.

Gayle leads the class as the No. 40 overall prospect and No. 2 shooting guard. Thornton trails right behind as the No. 42 overall recruit and No. 8 point guard, while Okpara (No. 56 / No. 11 C) and Sensabaugh (No. 59 / No. 18 SF) round out the top 60 recruits that signed with the Buckeyes.

"All four will play," Holtmann said. "Felix will need some time. He's 6-11 with a 7-3 wingspan, but he's only about 215 pounds right now. He's going to need some time to grow, but he will play. All four of those guys are going to play. It's our job to have a phenomenal player development program, and I think we've got to continue to do that."

Former Ohio State guard Joey Lane, who played under Holtmann in his first years coaching the Buckeyes, asked who Holtmann's favorite player might be among the new signees. The veteran head coach said Sensabaugh could be a difference-maker in his first season, comparing the 6-6 forward to former Ohio State guard Duane Washington Jr.

"He's physically one of the most unique players we've coached," Holtmann said of Sensabaugh. "He's Duane in a 6-6 frame, and he's as good a shooter as there is in the country as a freshman."

Holtmann said Sensabaugh will have a bright future in Columbus. He also mentioned Thorton as someone that can break through in his first season, citing that Thorton's Mr. Basketball in Georgia is a distinguishable honor for a player in a state Holtmann said has excellent high school basketball.

In addition to the five recruits, Ohio State added three transfers in the offseason, including Tanner Holden of Wright State, Isaac Likekele of Oklahoma State and Sean McNeil of West Virginia. All three will be seniors next season Holtmann expects them to be significant contributors in 2022-23.

"I think we had a really strong addition with some transfers. Which we needed to," Holtmann said. "This was a year unlike any we've had. We had a lot of guys, some that you expected that were obviously going to graduate or out of eligibility and then a guy like Malaki (Branham), who just had a phenomenal one-and-done season."

Holtmann, who recently received a three-year contract extension, understands that the college basketball landscape has completely changed with the latest transfer portal rules, making high school recruiting more important than ever.

"There's always a tremendous amount of pressure when you're recruiting because you want to recruit (the right) fits and high-level players. There was a lot riding on this class, and our staff did a great job. They did a phenomenal job," Holtmann said. "And now we've got to develop them."

The proper development of incoming freshman combined with the continued progression of Justice Sueing, Seth Towns, Zed Key and Eugene Brown creates the potential for Ohio State produce at a high level next season. Holtmann said the Buckeye coaching staff is working hard to make sure that happens.

"No one's hungrier than I think we are as a staff or as a program to continue to move this thing forward," Holtmann said. "That's what we're working really hard for every day."