

Holtmann Lauds Versatility Of Roster



It was an offseason of turnover on the Ohio State men's basketball roster. With 11 players from the 2021-22 roster leaving the program for a variety of reasons, head coach Chris Holtmann welcomed 10 new Buckeyes to Columbus since his team's second-round loss to Villanova in the NCAA Tournament.

The names on the roster are not the only thing that has changed. With the new team makeup, Holtmann expects this team to play with more pace and improve on the defensive end of the floor thanks to the overall positional versatility of the new additions.

"I think we are more versatile," Holtmann said at Ohio State media day on Monday. "We have a number of guys that are kind of in the middle of the lineup, those two, three, four positions that are pretty interchangeable. Their skill sets differ some, but they all can dribble, pass and shoot to varying degrees. They give us a bit of athleticism there.

"I think that versatility is really critical for us and has been critical for us both defensively and offensively," he continued.

Ohio State's versatility is seen in its guard unit, which boasts six players that stand between 6-2 and 6-6. Manning the point will likely be 6-2, 225-pound guard Bruce Thornton, a freshman, and Oklahoma State transfer Isaac Likekele who stands at 6-foot-5.

Despite Thornton and Likekele slotting in at the same position, Holtmann said they both have the ability to play off of the ball and will likely play together on numerous occasions.

"Isaac and Bruce will be on the floor together," Holtmann said. "Isaac has the ability to play the three and even some of the four. We'll have some small-ball lineups this year where we have some 6-5 and over positionless groups, and I think Isaac will be a part of that group for sure. Both of those guys will be on the floor a lot."

Holtmann noted that West Virginia transfer Sean McNeil may also see some time at point guard.

McNeil has been labeled as a sharpshooter for much of his career, tallying a 36.8 3-point percentage across his three seasons as a Mountaineer. But, Holtmann noted that McNeil is not limited to his three-point shooting and his game is more extensive than many believe.

"He's looking to expand part of his game but he also understands that his greatest strength is going to be the fact that he has to be guarded almost all over the floor. He does have some ball skills that I think are good," Holtmann said. "He's got a game that I think is a little bigger than what people think."

Wright State transfer Tanner Holden and third-year Buckeye Eugene Brown III will likely be tasked with playing in both the frontcourt and backcourt, depending on the situation. Both Holden and Brown stand at 6-foot-6.

In the frontcourt, Ohio State's versatility is aided by the freshman Brice Sensabaugh — who brings a polished offensive game to Columbus despite being a first-year player. Sensabaugh can score from anywhere on the court and Holtmann noted, during an interview with Big Ten Network's Andy Katz, that he is someone that will be relied on offensively.

After missing nearly all of last season with an abdominal injury, the Buckeyes also return the services of Justice Sueing. During his first season as a Buckeye, Sueing was counted on in a variety of roles and served as the emergency primary ballhandler when Ohio State's guard depth was decimated by injury.

Third-year forward Zed Key has also placed more importance on increasing his versatility this offseason, noting that he has worked on his mid-range and 3-point game.

"I've been expanding my range from the mid-range and shooting threes. I've been putting the ball on the floor a little bit," Key said. "I'm just trying to show my versatility."

With an increased focus on versatility, Holtmann emphasized that his roster will be able to adapt to the varying playstyles seen in the Big Ten.

"There are certainly different styles in the Big Ten, but a consistency to the way Big Ten rosters are built. We traditionally have a few more big guys in our league than in other leagues," Holtmann said. "You've seen some teams in our league, maybe because they've been frustrated with not advancing as far as they've wanted to, that have gotten a little more versatile and a little more athletic. I think you'll see that wave in the Big Ten."