

Holtmann Teases Potential Double-Big Lineup With Key and Okpara



In the closing minutes of Ohio State's 86-70 loss to Indiana on Saturday, the Buckeyes utilized a lineup that placed junior forward Zed Key and freshman center Felix Okpara on the court at the same time, marking the first time the duo shared the floor this season.

Key and Okpara shared the frontcourt for just 28 seconds of game action before head coach Chris Holtmann sent Key to the bench in favor of Eugene Brown III for the final 3:02 of play. Although the double-big lineup was used briefly against the Hoosiers, Holtmann revealed on Monday during his weekly radio show on 97.1 The Fan that the Buckeyes plan to utilize the big-man duo more in the future, primarily next season.

"It is something that we definitely plan to play next year, for sure," Holtmann said on 97.1 The Fan. "There's absolutely intent to play both of those guys together. Will we do it some more this year? We might, on certain matchups.

"Defensively is the biggest challenge, that's why you kind of need the whole offseason. But, there's no question that will be a big part of what we do next year," he continued. "The reality is there will still be sometimes when we see it this year."

Although Holtmann displayed some apprehension toward the duo's defensive potential, noting that Key may struggle with quicker, more athletic power forwards, he noted that having both Key and Okpara on the floor at a given time could help shore up the Buckeyes' rebounding ability in stretches.

"The biggest thing right now is the ability to rebound the ball better," Holtmann said. "That's our biggest issue right now, we're not rebounding the ball at the level we need to. It's a variety of things, but having that kind of length and size at the rim and rebounding will definitely help and it would allow us to rebound offensively better too.

“Those are two long guys and they’re two big bodies, and again there are some teams that play a traditional four and five and old-school four and five and that’s kind of what it would be.”

Okpara has traditionally played behind Key this season, primarily operating off of the bench. Holtmann noted that Okpara has made several strides with his game, which could allow him to share the floor with Key with more ease.

In 21 games this season, Okpara has posted 3.6 points per game while leading the Buckeyes in blocks with 25 on the campaign.

“His footwork has gotten better in the low post, so he’s got the ability to score some in the low post,” Holtmann said. “He’s going to be a really good player, I’ve said that, he’s going to be a really good play. He’s got great length and great athleticism. He’s got good enough touch to score, he’ll make free throws at a higher level.

“I don’t want to put too much on him, but he’s got to keep growing. He’s growing in front of our eyes.”

With Holtmann’s declaration that Key and Okpara will be further utilized in tandem, he reiterated that the Buckeyes will likely rely on that combination more next season than during this campaign.

“That Zed-Felix combination may not be something we see as much this year, but it’ll certainly be something we do moving forward,” Holtmann said.