

Key's Shoulder Under Further Evaluation While Buckeyes Hit Stretch Run



All Ohio State forward Zed Key could do was watch while the Buckeyes struggled to contain 7-foot center Zach Edey during their 82-55 loss to then-No. 3 Purdue on Sunday.

Key was sidelined against the Boilermakers after aggravating a lingering shoulder injury — which he initially sustained against Edey and Co. on Jan. 5 — on multiple occasions across the previous few weeks. While Key initially battled through the injury and downplayed its significance, it became too much to handle after he took a pair of hits to the shoulder during Ohio State's 92-75 loss to Iowa on Thursday.

Prior to the Buckeyes' extended road trip to Iowa and Purdue, Key said he hadn't put any thought toward shutting down his season to allow his shoulder to heal. But after being held out the final 15:46 of the Iowa game and the entirety of the loss to Purdue, head coach Chris Holtmann said the Buckeye big man is undergoing further evaluations to see if he can close out the season.

"He's being evaluated," Holtmann said during his weekly radio show on 97.1 The Fan. "We'll know more (after his evaluation). At some point, it will be a decision between him and his family in terms of what's the next direction to go in."

While Key's status for the rest of the season hangs in the balance, the Buckeyes have a very thin front court rotation to work with, as freshman center Felix Okpara and former walk-on Owen Spencer — who was placed on scholarship after OSU's 93-77 win over Iowa on Jan. 21 — are the only other natural frontcourt players for Ohio State. Holtmann has also worked 6-7 wing Eugene Brown III into a small-ball center role for the Buckeyes. Against Purdue, Brown played 23 minutes while primarily defending Edey.

Holtmann's patch-worked front court allowed Edey to rack up 26 points and corral 11 rebounds while the Boilermakers carved out a 44-21 rebounding advantage on Sunday.

As Ohio State could be without Key going forward, Holtmann recognized the significance that his loss could have on the Buckeyes as they look to close out the season in a respectable manner, but also noted it gives some of the younger players more opportunities to gain experience.

“Zed’s injury was significant,” Holtmann said. “He was a guy, even in the preseason, where we said ‘OK, we’re going to be much deeper next year at the five.’ This year, we knew we were going to be a little bit thin, so it was going to be hard if we lost any one of those guys for a significant period of time.

“What (Zed’s injury) does is continue to provide opportunities for Felix to grow,” he continued.