

Malaki Branham's 2022 NBA Draft Profile



When Malaki Branham arrived in Columbus as a freshman last fall, there weren't many who expected the Akron (Ohio) St. Vincent-St. Mary High School product would be a one-and-done prospect.

But here we are.

On June 23, Branham will be a first-round selection in the 2022 NBA Draft. The former Buckeye caught fire in Ohio State's final 15 games, averaging 17.7 points on 54.5 percent shooting and 44.7 percent shooting from three-point range. He's carrying that momentum into the draft, where he's expected to be an early to mid-first-round pick.

However, Branham openly admits that his time in Columbus wasn't always smooth sailing. After all, he averaged only 6.3 points per contest on less than 40 percent shooting in his first 10 games of 2021-22. Still, he kept working on his craft and developed the necessary skills to make himself a standout prospect in this year's draft.

"Mentally I was just being more in attack mode, picking my spots and also just helping the team out," Branham said. "I felt like physically, I was just getting in the weight room a lot. Just knowing how to pick my spots on the floor, I feel like that's how my game was on the rise in the second half of the season."

Branham interviewed with 10 different teams at the NBA Combine, including the Brooklyn Nets, Denver Nuggets, Milwaukee Bucks, Oklahoma City Thunder, Miami Heat, Minnesota Timberwolves, New York Knicks, Houston Rockets and Philadelphia 76ers. The Rockets (No. 3) and the Knicks (No. 11) possess lottery picks, and the Thunder have two (No. 2 and No. 12).

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann understands the rave around Branham, claiming the former Buckeye forward shows tremendous character and leadership on and off the basketball court.

"I'm really happy just for him and his family, just because he's the kind of kid - he's like E.J. (Liddell) and so many of our kids - they're really easy," Holtmann said. "When I get a call from an NBA executive asking about who he is as a person, 'How long you got? I'll talk as long as you want to talk.'

"We anticipated (Branham) being certainly a high-level player for us as a sophomore, so you have to change plans, change course a little bit. But more than anything, it'll be a great moment for our program when his name's called."

Branham measured at 6-feet 5-inches and weighed 195 pounds at the event. His 29-inch standing vertical jump and 35-inch max vertical don't compare to Liddell's numbers, but they put Branham in the middle of the pack for his vertical athleticism. Branham shined in the agility and speed portion of the workout, clocking in a 3.09-second shuttle run and a 3.17-second three quarter sprint.

MALAKI BRANHAM'S 2022 NBA COMBINE RESULTS

PLAYER	HT (IN SHOES)	WT	BODY FAT	WINGSPAN	STANDING REACH	STANDING VERT (IN)	MAX VERT	SHUTTLE RUN (S)	LANE AGILITY (S)	THREE QUARTER SPRINT (S)
MALAKI BRANHAM	6'5"	195	6.1%	6'10"	8'6.5"	29	35	3.09	11.38	3.17

Branham has drawn comparisons to Milwaukee's Khris Middleton, a three-time All-Star who has averaged at least 20 points in four of the past five seasons. While Branham appreciates the comparisons to the decorated Bucks player, he claims to model his game after other NBA stars.

"I like to watch Caris Lavert," Branham said. "He's a Columbus guy as well. I also watch Devin Booker. They're the same sized guys, so I like to watch them a lot to see how they get to their spots."

Lavert plays for the Cleveland Cavaliers and Devin Booker for the Phoenix Suns. The Cavaliers have the No. 14 pick and could be in the running for Branham, *The Athletic's* Kelsey Russo reported last week. Cleveland has a history with players from St. Vincent-St. Mary High School (see: LeBron James), so they could test another Irish product in the 2022 NBA Draft.

Wherever Branham ends up, he will look to make a significant impact as a rookie and beyond. The combine and workouts came and went with a blur, as did his freshman season. Still, Branham learned much about himself and how hard work can make dreams come true.

"It definitely happened pretty quick, especially the second half of the season," Branham said. "I learned a lot, being patient, wait my turn and work towards my dream."