

Men's Basketball Year In Review: Brice Sensabaugh



In a season that saw four freshmen take major strides, no first-year Buckeye saw more development than forward Brice Sensabaugh.

Joining the Buckeyes as the No. 65 overall recruit in the 2022 class, the third-highest ranking of Ohio State's five-man class, Sensabaugh emerged as the Buckeyes' leading scorer — producing a team-best 16.3 points per game while shooting an efficient 48.2 percent from the field and 40.5 percent from three-point range.

Even before the season, Holtmann recognized the overwhelming offensive potential that Sensabaugh possessed, comparing him to another former Buckeye flamethrower.

"He's physically one of the most unique players we've coached," Holtmann said on May 27, 2022. "He's Duane (Washington Jr.) in a 6-6 frame, and he's as good a shooter as there is in the country as a freshman."

Sensabaugh's scoring potential was apparent from the jump.

In his collegiate debut, Sensabaugh torched Robert Morris for 17 points and nine rebounds in just 18 minutes of action. He followed that up with 14 and 20-point outings against Charleston Southern and Eastern Illinois, respectively, aiding Ohio State to a 3-0 start by averaging 17.0 points per game on 50 percent shooting while averaging just 18.0 minutes off of the bench.

"As games go by, and I get more comfortable in myself and playing with this team, it's just taking what the defense gives me," Sensabaugh said after the win over the Panthers on Nov. 16, 2022. "We prepare very well for games and we scout their defense and what they're going to look like coming into the game. So, it's just picking them apart and getting to our spots."

The Buckeyes then faced a difficult slate of competition at the Maui Invitational, but Sensabaugh didn't slow down. Against eventual national runner-up San Diego State, Sensabaugh was a flamethrower off of the bench, producing 17 points on 5-of-10 shooting, but the Buckeyes suffered their first loss of the season 88-77 at the hands of the Aztecs. Ohio State ended up going 2-1 in Maui, registering wins over Cincinnati and Texas Tech, while Sensabaugh put up 14.7 points on 56.0 percent shooting during the three-game tournament.

Sensabaugh hit his first bump in the road against Duke at Cameron Indoor Stadium on Nov. 30, 2022, after he fouled out after just 14 minutes of action. His inability to defend without fouling against the Blue Devils set the stage for a season-long issue for Sensabaugh, who fouled out five times during his freshman campaign.

But three games later, Sensabaugh shined for a national audience during the CBS Sports Classic against North Carolina in New York City. Sensabaugh shook off the bright lights of Madison Square Garden to produce 22 points, including a go-ahead mid-range jumper with 2.0 seconds remaining, but the Buckeyes couldn't hold on, falling 89-84 in overtime. His breakout performance against the Tar Heels also began speculation surrounding his future with Ohio State, with Sensabaugh beginning to appear on NBA mock drafts.

From then on, Sensabaugh played under the microscope as an NBA Draft hopeful, and early indications showed that Sensabaugh was living up to the hype. From the North Carolina game forward, Sensabaugh produced at least 20 points in six of the Buckeyes' next 10 games, while scoring at least 18 points in all 10 games. With another stellar offensive stretch, Sensabaugh emphasized that he could hear the buzz surrounding his NBA Draft stock but remained committed to the task at hand with Ohio State.

"I hear it, I'd be lying to you if I said I wasn't," Sensabaugh said. "But, to be honest, I try to focus on staying where my feet are and living in the moment, and I think I do a pretty good job of that. I don't really pay much attention to it, to be honest.

"Whatever I can do, in the moment, to play however I'm playing or make little improvements for Ohio State, obviously things like that build up, your performance gets better or anything of that nature, it can reflect on the future," he continued. "But right now, I'm just in the moment."

Sensabaugh's scoring tear included a career-best 27-point outing against Iowa, in which he led the Buckeyes to a 93-77 win over the Hawkeyes and snapped a five-game losing streak for Ohio State. Although the win over Iowa seemed to signal good things to come for Sensabaugh and the Buckeyes, OSU was further sent into a tailspin and endured another lengthy losing streak, dropping its next nine games.

While Sensabaugh's production largely remained on track during Ohio State's initial five-game losing streak, he saw struggles in the Buckeyes' following nine-game slide. Sensabaugh saw his scoring average drop to 14.7 points per game while his efficiency tanked, as he shot 43.0 percent from the field and 35.0 percent from three during the nine-game stretch.

While his offensive production plummeted, his defensive shortcomings were also exposed during the losing streak. Sensabaugh fouled out in back-to-back games, causing Holtmann to wrestle with Sensabaugh's place in the rotation, sending him to the bench for a pair of games. Sensabaugh ultimately reclaimed his starting spot, but Holtmann noted the freshman forward's defense was hurting

the Buckeyes in certain stretches.

“There are two ends (of the floor),” Holtmann said in regard to Sensabaugh’s defense. “He’s got to continue to grow on the other end. There are times when it does impact our team and he knows that, he’s working hard at that.”

The Buckeyes got back on track after winning two of their last three games in the regular season, gaining some momentum for the Big Ten Tournament — which they needed to win to secure a spot in the NCAA Tournament. In the conference tournament, Sensabaugh aided the Buckeyes to a pair of wins in the opening round, averaging 12.5 points and 7.5 rebounds per game in both contests.

But, Sensabaugh’s postseason run was cut short after he sustained a knee injury in the closing minutes of OSU’s second-round win over Iowa on March 9. The Buckeyes went on to reach the semifinals of the Big Ten Tournament before being defeated by eventual conference champion Purdue, as Sensabaugh looked on after being ruled out for the rest of the tournament before the game.

As Sensabaugh certainly exceeded expectations in his first season with the Buckeyes, he announced on March 25 that he would enter the NBA Draft while maintaining his collegiate eligibility. He is currently rated as a consensus first-round pick and has until May 31 to decide whether to remain in the draft or return to Ohio State.

“It’s (the product) of just working hard, working on off days and in the offseason, leading up to the season, before practice and after practice,” Sensabaugh said. “It’s just working on little details and skills, polishing my game and stuff like that to the point where I can feel comfortable on the court to do what I practice and stay confident.

“I’m just trying to perfect my craft, so when it comes time for game time, it’s kind of just natural.”