Men's Basketball Year In Review: Dale Bonner

Ohio State dipped into the transfer portal this offseason with the intent of finding a guard to play behind the young duo of Bruce Thornton and Roddy Gayle Jr. The Buckeyes found their answer in former Baylor guard Dale Bonner, who will provide a veteran presence in Ohio State's backcourt next season.

Bonner played a depth role for Baylor last season, likely filling similar responsibilities to what he will face at Ohio State while playing 19.4 minutes per game for the Bears and posting 4.7 points and 2.7 assists per contest. He committed to Ohio State on April 17 after entering the transfer portal on April 5.

After a difficult first season for the Bears in 2021-22, in which Bonner was tasked with adjusting to the demands of high-major Division I basketball after a pair of seasons at Division II Fairmont State, Bonner quickly showed he belonged at the top tier of collegiate basketball in 2022-23. In the season opener against Mississippi Valley State, Bonner stuffed the stat sheet with 14 points, six assists, four rebounds and three steals while connecting on 5-of-6 shooting — including a 3-of-4 mark from deep. Two games later against Northern Colorado, Bonner delivered a similarly dominant performance, scoring 12 points while adding four rebounds, four assists and six steals in a 95-62 win on Nov. 14, 2022.

Bonner's early-season tear stood out to Baylor head coach Scott Drew, who fashioned the Shaker Heights (Ohio) native as an important cog in the Bears' machine.

"Dale is somebody that, last year, we thought would be a year that he would spend developing, and he was able to help us win last year," Drew said. "He's taken another step forward. Dale is a tremendous player and Dale helps you in so many different ways. There's not a better ball-mover in the country."

Bonner took that responsibility as a floor general off the bench to the limit against McNeese State on Nov. 23, dishing out a career-best 12 assists in the 89-60 over the Cowboys. He tallied at least one assist in each of the next nine games, including a seven-assist outing against Northwestern State on Dec. 20, 2022, and a pair of six-assist performances against Nicholls State on Dec. 28, 2022, and Kansas State on Jan. 7.

But as the Bears entered the heart of Big 12 play, Bonner saw his role diminish. From Jan. 14 through Feb. 13, Bonner averaged just 5.0 minutes per game across seven outings for Baylor. Bonner only totaled three points during the span, coming off of a three-pointer against Texas on Jan. 30, the only game in the span in which he played double-digit minutes.

An injury to star guard Keyonte George thrust Bonner back into the rotation, and Bonner made sure to take advantage of the opportunity. With George suffering an ankle injury early in the first half against then-No. 8 on Feb. 25, Bonner connected on 4 of 6 field goal attempts to produce 13 points, four assists and two steals to push the Bears to a 81-72 win over the Longhorns.

 "Only five can play, so your job on the bench is to be the best teammate that you can and keep working until you get that opportunity," Drew said of Bonner's performance against Texas. "(Dale) was an unbelievable teammate and supported his team, kept working on his game and stayed ready. Today, I couldn't be any more happy and pleased for him."

Bonner enjoyed his resurfaced role for the rest of the season, producing 8.5 points and 2.5 assists per game across Baylor's final six games of the season.

While Bonner has experience playing behind young talent and filling in as a floor general off of the bench, he fits several distinct needs for the Buckeyes in regard to their depth. With the opportunity to work behind sophomores Thornton and Gayle, as well as incoming freshman combo guard Taison Chatman, Bonner will carry, by far, the most experience of any guard in the Ohio State backcourt. The Buckeyes will also have a backup point guard that has shown that he can facilitate the ball at a high level, as well as manage an offense at a high-major program.