

Ohio State Athletic Director Gene Smith Not Ready To Make Decision On Head Coach Chris Holtmann's Future



Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith is not ready to make any significant decisions regarding the future of the men's basketball team and head coach Chris Holtmann but will be closely monitoring how the rest of the 2023-24 regular season transpires, he told the Columbus Dispatch

"We have a lot of this season left to play, and we have coaches and players that are focused on winning every day," Smith told the Dispatch. "I'm looking forward to seeing how this turns out."

Smith, who is set to retire from his position on June 30, 2024, and will be replaced by Texas A&M athletic director Ross Bjork, has consistently offered support for the 52-year-old Holtmann amid the program's recent struggles. Smith rated Holtmann as "excellent" in his 2022-23 performance review following the team's subpar 16-19 season — which included a stretch of 14 losses in 15 games — and told Buckeye Sports Bulletin in June that he was pleased with the coach's ability to navigate his young team through a difficult year.

"I feel great about Chris' on-floor coaching," Smith told BSB last summer. "He's a very good teacher. But we needed to get to a point where our roster was being managed appropriately, and I feel that happened, so I'm really excited about the future, too."

"People aren't giving him the respect he deserves," he continued. "From a recruiting point of view, we've had two top-five classes back-to-back and two one-and-dones....We have a group of young men that really bought in and they'll be our leadership for the future."

But a similar set of struggles for Ohio State in 2023-24 has placed mounting pressure and criticism on Holtmann and his program heading into February. After a strong 12-2 start that included a quality win over then-No.22 Alabama, Ohio State has hit a slide at the start of Big Ten play, dropping five of its last

six games. This stretch was capped by perhaps the Buckeyes' worst two losses of the season — a 14-point defeat at Nebraska on Tuesday followed by a 25-point blowout loss to Northwestern on Saturday — which also gave the Buckeyes its 13th and 14th-straight road defeats.

Despite the difficult stretch of play, Holtmann told the media after the Nebraska game that he still has full belief in his ability to lead his team out of these midseason struggles.

"You coach long enough, you have moments that are certainly really humbling and that's part of being in a profession like this," he said. "For all of us, we have to find a way to get them in a better mindset and prepare to play better than what we've played. I don't think we played nearly this poorly during this stretch, but we certainly have this last game and a half. We have to figure out how to correct it here quickly."

Holtmann, who is in the midst of his seventh season as Ohio State's head coach, agreed to a multi-year extension in the summer of 2022 that put him under contract through 2027-28. If Smith — or Bjork — decide to terminate Holtmann's contract before then, he would be owed his full remaining salary, which is currently slated at around \$14 million.