

Ohio State Dealing With Reality Of Lost Season



While Ohio State's NCAA Tournament aspirations have **all but evaporated** during its 1-14 stretch since Jan. 5, Holtmann has wrestled with the challenge of keeping his team engaged in the midst of a lost season.

As the losses have piled up for the Buckeyes, Holtmann said he and his players need to dive into the grind and continue to emphasize growth moving forward. While Holtmann admitted that his players can feel the temperature rising on them from outside the program, he noted that the Buckeyes just need to continue to show up every day and get lost in the work.

"How could they not (feel pressure)?" Holtmann said after Ohio State's 62-41 loss to Michigan State on Feb. 12. "It's part of being in the public eye, it's part of playing at a major university. I think they do a good job, to some degree, of blocking it out, but that's a lot to ask.

"The answer is to throw yourself in your work and focus on the work."

The Buckeyes' mid-season tailspin has Ohio State fans searching for answers as to what could have caused a team that started the season 10-3 to fall all the way to 11-17 by late February. Whether it be on or off the court, there are several issues plaguing the Buckeyes, but Key said he still feels the team is connected despite the recent struggles.

"We're still a together team," Key said after Ohio State's loss to Wisconsin on Feb. 2. "There are no problems in the locker room. We still hang out with each other, we like each other. So there's definitely no problems there, we're just in a slump right now."

For Ohio State's four contributing freshmen, the recent losing stretch has been something none of them have ever experienced. The quartet of Bruce Thornton, Roddy Gayle Jr., Brice Sensabaugh and Felix Okpara all saw overwhelming on-the-court success during their high school careers, with Thornton claiming a Georgia state title and all four players competing deep into their high school playoffs.

Although the strain of losing has grown for the team's younger players, Thornton has kept an optimistic outlook despite the difficulties plaguing the Buckeyes.

"It's just very frustrating, losing, to keep it honest," Thornton said after the loss to Michigan State. "Losing, in general, just is not a good feeling at all. So, I feel as a team, we still have that confidence in each other and we still have time, we just got to make tomorrow a better day because that's the only thing we can do at this point right now."

Not only have the players felt the heat of losing, but Holtmann also acknowledged that the recent stretch has gotten to his own psyche, as well.

"It's a dark time when you are struggling," Holtmann said. "I think you have to be able to approach each day with the optimism that we're going to grow and get better."

"It certainly can be challenging," he continued. "You feel these things in a way that's hard to understand. You eat differently, and you sleep differently. You just live differently when you lose a game, so it's certainly the case."

Although the losing slide has hampered the Buckeyes' confidence in recent months, Thornton said the team's younger players will use this difficult season as motivation to improve moving forward.

"I never want to go through this ever again," Thornton said. "No matter how long I'm here as a Buckeye, I just never want to have this feeling of every time you go into the locker room, you're just like 'Dang, we've lost again and again.'"

"It's just a feeling where you feel helpless, but I just never want to have that feeling again," he continued. "So, us in the future and working this summer, it's going to be a different level of intensity so we can just not have this feeling next year."