

Ohio State Forward E.J. Liddell Enters Draft, Will Maintain Eligibility



Ohio State star forward E.J. Liddell announced today that he's entering his name into the 2021 NBA Draft, but that he will maintain his college eligibility, similar to the move that former Buckeye center Kaleb Wesson took following the 2018-19 season.

pic.twitter.com/bGn5JRe4Iv

— E.J. Liddell (@EasyE2432) March 31, 2021

"I feel so fortunate for what I've experienced in my two seasons as a Buckeye and what we've accomplished together," Liddell wrote in his announcement letter. "The success I've had wouldn't have been possible without the support of my teammates, coaches and family who have supported me along this amazing journey.

"Choosing to play for Coach Holtmann and The Ohio State University has been one of the best decisions I've made in my life, and I thank God for every opportunity given to me. After spending time consulting with my family and coaches, I have decided I will be entering my name into the 2021 NBA Draft while maintaining my college eligibility.

"Reaching the NBA has always been a dream of mine ever since I started playing basketball with my first YMCA team. Timing is everything, trust I won't rush. Go Buckeyes!"

The move isn't much of a surprise for Ohio State's standout sophomore. NCAA rules allow for underclassmen to declare for the NBA draft and go through all of the pre-draft process to receive feedback from teams without losing their college eligibility. Wesson made the same move following his sophomore season and took his feedback to heart, shedding roughly 40 pounds to play faster in his junior season in accordance with what scouts told him about his game. Barring very good feedback, Liddell is expected to return to Columbus for his third season.

This comes after a rough patch for the Illinois native, who spoke about his experience with nasty social media messages after Ohio State's first round loss in the NCAA Tournament to Oral Roberts.

Honestly, what did I do to deserve this? I'm human. pic.twitter.com/djXzhSH0q8

— E.J. Liddell (@EasyE2432) March 20, 2021

In speaking about the messages, when asked about his outlook moving forward, Liddell focused less on basketball and more on his life at large.

"I'm just focused on getting back to our regular life," Liddell said. "Being a little bit more social. Getting back to my video games."

He did mention that the loss will fuel the Buckeyes this offseason, alluding to an eventual return to Columbus, though this was prior to his announcement today.

"I mean, it sits on my mind pretty heavy," Liddell said. "It sits on everybody else's minds pretty heavy, I believe, too. But I mean, you look at Virginia. They lost to a 16 seed. They came back and won a national championship. It's going to help us motivate through the offseason, every workout. Just that heartbreaking loss and that pain that we went through after that loss, I don't think it'll ever leave my mind."

"If everybody puts in the work they did in the offseason, it's going to be pretty hard to beat us. I saw Malaki (Branham) had like 37 in his state championship game. That was pretty cool. Congrats to him. I feel like the young guys coming in give a big help. Meechie Johnson, he used this year to learn a lot from C.J. (Walker) and things of that sort. I feel like we can be pretty good."

The former Mr. Illinois winner averaged 16.2 points and 6.7 rebounds on the season for the No. 2-seeded Buckeyes in 2020-21.