

Ohio State Freshmen Finding Their Way Early In Big Ten Play



Since the offseason, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann has preached the idea of normalizing struggle regarding the Buckeyes' four contributing freshmen.

Now, with the Buckeyes in the midst of their first stretch of consecutive losses — falling to then-No. 1 Purdue and Maryland in back-to-back games — Holtmann noted that normalizing struggle has become different now that Ohio State is in the brunt of its Big Ten slate.

“All of them, all four freshmen, have had a level of success and they’ve handled that pretty well,” Holtmann said. “They’ve also had some struggles, and we’ll see how we handle that. But, I think it’s different when you’re out there kind of for everybody to see and everybody to do whatever they do when teams or kids struggle, that’s different.

“You try to help kids remember that this is really about us growing as a group, us moving forward,” he continued.

Ohio State’s freshman class has largely exceeded expectations through the Buckeyes’ first 15 games. Forward Brice Sensabaugh leads OSU in scoring with 16.7 points per game, while point guard Bruce Thornton has dished out a team-best 3.3 assists per contest to go along with 10.0 points per game.

While Sensabaugh and Thornton have flashed offensively, combo guard Roddy Gayle Jr. and center Felix Okpara have made their impact on the defensive end of the floor. Gayle has registered four blocks and nine steals this season while Okpara has produced 1.1 blocks per game.

However, the Buckeyes have struggled across the board in their last two games. Sensabaugh and Thornton’s shooting efficiency and defense have lapsed at times, while Okpara found himself picking up early fouls in the loss to Maryland.

Although the freshmen run into some issues during the most recent stretch, Okpara noted that Holtmann is continuing to emphasize growth as the Buckeyes move through their schedule.

“Coach Holtmann always says ‘You got to get better every day,’” Okpara said. “I feel like we do make some mistakes, and I feel like if we can clean up our mistakes in practice and get good before games, I feel like we’re going to be good.”

As Ohio State’s freshmen are enduring their first losing stretch since their high school days, Gayle noted that the biggest lesson he’s taken to this point in the season is to just live in the moment.

“The biggest lesson (I’ve taken) is to be where your feet are,” Gayle said. “Coach Holtmann went over that during the summer, but I never really grasped it until now. It’s like, ‘Don’t think about games ahead or plays behind.’ You just need to be where your feet are on every possession and every play.”