

Ohio State Guard Bruce Thornton Returning To Jake Diebler-Led Program For Junior Season



Ohio State's most productive player from the 2023-24 season is staying in Columbus for another year.

Sophomore guard Bruce Thornton announced Tuesday that he will return to the Jake Diebler-led Buckeyes for his third season with the program.

📷@TheFoundation1_ pic.twitter.com/mgyUjLM3lF

— Bruce Thornton (@Bruce2T_) April 2, 2024

Thornton, a two-time team captain who has two seasons of collegiate eligibility remaining, is coming off a sophomore season where he emerged as the Buckeyes' unquestioned team leader and most consistent player all season. Thornton started all but one game for Ohio State in 2023-24 and led the team in scoring (15.7 points per game), assists (4.8), steals (1.2) and minutes played (33.6 per game). It was an all-around performance that earned him a third-team All-Big Ten honor from coaches and media after the season.

While Thornton's play on the court — where he also ranked second in the nation in assist-to-turnover ratio at 4.0 (168 assists to 42 turnovers) — allowed him to gain the respect of his opponents, leading to constant double-teams and traps from other teams, it was leadership that was perhaps most valuable to the locker room.

Thornton put a strong emphasis on galvanizing his team with his words and actions in the weeks after former Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann's firing and Diebler's elevation to interim leader on Feb. 14, a unique display of leadership that those around the program gushed at throughout the back-end of the year. He also repeatedly voiced his commitment to the program just two days after Holtmann's firing, despite teams reportedly already contacting his family about a potential transfer.

"He's a tone setter," Diebler said earlier this season. "His consistency is all-time great, as far as consistently bringing his best stuff. It's kind of like how Aaron Craft was. That's how David Lighty would've been like. So the consistency he brings is really valuable."

Now, the rising junior Thornton will get another chance to display and further develop his skills as a team leader and floor general for the Scarlet and Gray in 2024-25, where he will join a Buckeyes' backcourt that will likely include fellow rising junior Roddy Gayle Jr., sophomore Taison Chatman and incoming four-star freshman Juni Mobley.

Ohio State will also likely add to that backcourt group through the transfer portal this offseason.

On3's Joe Tipton reported that the program has reached out to former South Carolina point guard Meechie Johnson — who played two seasons for the Buckeyes from 2020-22 — while the Columbus Dispatch reported that they have extended an offer to former Princeton guard and Hilliard, Ohio, native Matt Allocco. The Buckeyes' backcourt has also been bitten by the transfer portal this offseason, with freshman guard Scotty Middleton announcing he is transferring from the program on Monday.

Thornton is the second starting Buckeye to announce he is returning to the program next season. Sophomore center Felix Okpara also pledged his loyalty to Diebler and Ohio State on Monday, saying he is committed to staying with the team for his junior season.

Let's run it back! Go bucks pic.twitter.com/Tda4vKHQFg

— felixokpara (@Felixokpara24) April 2, 2024

Both Thornton and Okpara alluded to The Foundation — Ohio State's top NIL collective — in their social media posts, signaling that the collective, which features five former Buckeyes including Mike Conley, Evan Turner and D'Angelo Russell, among others, may have played a large role in their decisions to return to the program due to their potential financial support and backing.