

Ohio State HC Chris Holtmann Says C.J. Walker Is Out Indefinitely With Hand Injury, Discusses Matchup With No. 15 Rutgers



Coming off a disappointing 77-60 loss at Minnesota, the Ohio State men's basketball team will try to get back on track against No. 15 Rutgers on Saturday, Jan. 9 at 12 p.m. ET.

Head coach Chris Holtmann spoke to members of the media via Zoom video conference on Thursday, Jan. 7 to preview the matchup.

What follows is a rundown paraphrasing what Holtmann said:

Opening Statement/C.J. Walker injury announcement:

- The first matter here is detailing C.J.'s injury. It's an injury he's been dealing with since our first scrimmage. Unfortunately, it's gotten worse and he will be out for now. We do not know when he will be back, but this has been something that he's been dealing with all season.
- This is a terrific Rutgers team. So well-coached. Really one of my favorite teams to watch in the Big Ten because of how they compete and how connected they are. Tremendous weapons, Jacob Young, Ron Harper Jr., Geo Baker. In this league you go from one game to another angrily because of how competitive it is.

Limiting the offense with C.J. Walker's injury?

- We try not to limit them. If they're good to go, they're good to go. We try not to limit them. But he's been hit on it a few times. It's impacted his shooting and overall, his aggressiveness.

Replacing C.J. Walker?

- We got the news right after the Minnesota game, the next day. So, we've been trying to evaluate how to handle that.

- Our two quote-unquote point guards coming into the year, in C.J. and Abel (Porter), are no longer available. I've never had that before. And we're losing a very good perimeter defender in C.J. and we just don't turn the ball over a lot when it's in his hands.

Day off with no game?

- We didn't find out until the day before the game (Tuesday), so everything is just day-to-day at this point. We did workouts and extra work in the film room to break up the practice schedule.

Rutgers big man Myles Johnson?

- There is obviously a lot of size in our league. And we've played against it all year. I think as much as anything, we have to engage defensively earlier and better. Our guys have to work harder in the post. They've got to use their mobility a little bit better, and our perimeter players have to help. At the end of the day, I don't look at that as anything more than 'we need to get better.'
- Rutgers has a terrific big man, he really is a really good player. He got into some foul trouble last time we played them, which was talked about. He's smart, he's talented, and he's experienced.

Sophomore center Ibrahima Diallo?

- He'll be out for a while with an MCL sprain.

Decision on C.J. Walker?

- Collective decision. He was frustrated with it. When the tests came back and showed a couple ligament tears, I think that was in his mind, I want to see if there's an alternative to playing through it right now. I think he's trying to figure out how do I best come back and get myself a chance to be at myself, or grind through it and never feel the same. We believe he can return.

Senior guard Jimmy Sotos?

- I think he's ready. I'm looking forward to seeing his minutes increase and his role will definitely need to increase. He's being thrown into the fire against this group of Rutgers guards who are very talented and dangerous offensively. Jacob Young is one of the most explosive players in our conference.

Team morale?

- Our spirit is good, it's been really good in practice. They weren't caught by surprise with this injury. They've known that he's been struggling with this for the whole season. They've been in really good spirits. They were disappointed to not be able to play this week. But we've talked about it, resiliency is so important with what we're going through.

Follow-up on C.J. Walker?

- He's got a call with a hand specialist in Brad Watson right now, so I think we'll know more, but the specifics of which I do not know now. Time is the most important thing for him right now to heal naturally.

Fourth-year junior wing Justice Sueing an option in the backcourt? Maybe junior wing Justin

Ahrens?

- Justin has played mostly the 2 this year. For us, ball handling and passing is critical. Justin doesn't necessarily add to that, but Justice will play a role in that. And we will continue to get Meechie ready for when he can play.

Availability of freshman guard Meechie Johnson?

- In reality, he was going to begin to get to regular practices at this point, and game availability. He's been on a normal schedule, and we will not accelerate it because we want to keep his health as the priority.

What does freshman guard Meechie Johnson need to do to be ready?

- We just need to see more live practices. He literally just started practicing with our group in live situations. He's got to learn all that we do offensively and defensively. I'm not ruling out him playing Saturday and moving forward, but it will depend how he does in practice.

How much of a feel could you get for backup point guards with all the minutes Walker was playing?

- This is where we'll get a better feel for them, really. Outside of Jimmy, we haven't really seen Justice play much at the point. Jimmy has done some good things for us, but he really hasn't played much.

Replacing C.J. Walker?

- C.J. has a strong voice within the team. As much as anything, we're going to need an increase in our collective level of play, but we're also going to need an increase in leadership. As we move forward, I'm going to have to look at potentially playing as many as 11 guys. It's hard to do that as you get into league play consistently. Guys are going to need to be ready. If we have success, it will be because guys raise their level of play.

Evaluating the last Rutgers game?

- Unique game. You don't come back from 16 much, much less against the 11th-ranked team in the country. They are very good in that environment at the RAC. It was a really unique game because it turned really pretty quickly in the last 15 minutes of the game. I don't know if you can take much from that, because I expect it to be a different game.

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