



Ohio State Head Coach Chris Holtmann Discusses Injuries, Previews Penn State

The No. 13 Ohio State men's basketball team will take on Penn State on Jan. 27 coming off a big win at Wisconsin.

Head coach Chris Holtmann spoke to members of the media, discussing his team's health and previewing the matchup with the Nittany Lions, which our led by interim head coach Jim Ferry. What follows is a rundown paraphrasing what Holtmann said:

Opening Statement:

- This is our toughest week to date. We play two really good teams that are at different points in their seasons due to COVID.
- It comes down to execution. And which team is playing better on a given night.
- Penn State is talented, well-coached. Jim has done a good job with them. I believe they're an NCAA Tournament team.

COVID?

- The moment you pat yourself on being somewhat COVID free is when it bites you. Our guys have been great though.
- Our guys have enjoyed the season, and that helps. It could happen at anytime, we could get shut down tomorrow. I hope we don't, but we couldn't.

Justin Ahrens getting more minutes than Musa Jallow?

- They play a little bit different positions in our offense and defense.
- With C.J. Walker going out, it opened up more opportunity for Justin.
- Musa is a tremendous young man, and a really good player. He's still shaking off some rust from not playing this season. And the reality is you can't play everybody. We've played Gene (Brown) in some of these minutes, but whoever gets squeezed out has to stay ready because anything can change.

Did early preparations for Penn State help you this time around?

We prepared for them, but they're a little different now. They're a little different now. They've played well recently, on a two-game winning streak. They won at Virginia Tech, who is atop the ACC. We've had to tweak our preparation.

C.J. Walker?

- It's always going to be a pain tolerance situation. If he gets hit or if it's bothering him, then he might have to play less, and that will be up to him. I know the torn ligaments are not completely.

Ibrahima Diallo and Jimmy Sotos?

- Ibrahima is still out with an MCL injury and has not returned to practice. Jimmy Sotos is still out with a shoulder injury. Neither will play against Penn State.

Winning on the road?

- A real sign of maturity is if we can consistently perform. They play completely different than Penn State. That's the challenge of it. Some of it is your ability as a team to compete against different styles. There aren't really a lot of bad matchups for elite teams. In this league, Penn State played Michigan as well as anybody on the road. The ones that don't come down to the last couple minutes are a surprise.

Defensive growth?

- Rebounding is going to be critical. They get loose balls better than anybody in the league, the best that I've seen on film. Transition defense — we have struggled with that. We have to coach it better, and we have to get better. Some of our new guys are struggling with it, and some of our returning guys have had . And some of coverages have to get better. We don't have a 7-foot shot blocker to rely on, but we can get better in some areas.

E.J. Liddell?

- He's a young man. He's won everywhere he's went. And he's been a big part of that. So, winning is really important to him. He's a talented kid, and he's also a really good kid. He's got a great family. And they don't make excuses for him, they push him. I thought he would take a step forward, but he's taken a significant jump from his freshman to his sophomore year.

Don't sleep on Penn State?

- It's our job as coaches to make sure how good Penn State is.
- This team got us real good at their place just a few months ago, and a lot of their guys returned. So, I think our guys who returned are aware of that.
- Living on social media, it's a recipe for inconsistency. I think the challenge is stay in the moment. Teams are going to beat you when you're at your best in this league, so try to be at your best every night.

Ahrens hasn't played this much before. What makes you confident in him?

- He creates great gravity for you offensively. People are naturally hugging him because of how well he shoots it consistency. He'll be really challenged tomorrow because of the quality of their guards across the board. He's earned this playing time, and he's a big part of why we've won four of five games.

Seth Towns?

- The tough thing for him is he can't consistency practice right now, and neither can Kyle Young, just because of dealing with injuries. There were days leading up to the Wisconsin game where he just couldn't practice. And I think that will be the case until he gets a full offseason to recover.

January success?

- Some of it is how you're playing, some of it is the schedule, some of it is the rhythm you're in.
- Our best team last year was our best offensive efficiency and defensive efficiency team. Last year, when the league was better, we had taken some lumps. Our first team had a really good Big Ten run record but the league wasn't as good.

Tough not to play certain players?

- You'd love to play everybody as much as you could play them. Most years I've had tough conversations with young men about them wanting to start.
- We haven't stuck to seven but we've been at 9 or 10 . but guys have to stay ready because injuries and COVID can happen to anybody.

Competing against teams of different styles?

- They've got a really good shooting team, really good offensively and really disruptive defensively.
- You have to execute well against Penn State too, but it's different. You have to make plays on the fly against their pressure.

Women's team's success?

- Great win for our women. They've had a great Big Ten season. Great win. I'm very happy for them.

Seth Towns?

- We've all had to adjust how quickly our expectations. Having said that, I think he's been

tremendous for us. We've just

- We don't win several of these most recent games without Seth Towns. I'm excited about his continual growth and how he can help
- What he has is great touch at 6-8 and can be a mismatch issue. The tough part has been the other end and figuring that out because of injuries. He's got phenomenal touch. They are hard shots to shoot.

For four free issues of the print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, no card required, sign up at the link here: <http://www.buckeyesports.com/subscribe-4issue-trial/>