

Ohio State Head Coach Chris Holtmann Discusses Matchup With Nebraska, Defining Roles



Coming off a big 80-68 win over Rutgers and a disappointing 71-70 loss at Northwestern, the Ohio State men's basketball team will welcome Nebraska to Value City Arena on Dec. 30 for another Big Ten battle.

The Huskers are coached by Fred Hoiberg, and they have started 4-5, including 0-2 in the Big Ten with losses to Wisconsin and Michigan.

What follows is a rundown paraphrasing what Holtmann said while discussing the matchup with Nebraska, the health of his squad, his players finding roles, and more:

Opening statement:

- We're back at it with preparation for a Nebraska team that looks a bit different. Lots of positional size. I've always respected how Fred's teams have moved the ball and shared it. They have played well defensively this year.

Comfortable with deep rotation?

- It's a good question because it's more than we've typically played. Some of that has been the addition of Musa (Jallow). Also, Musa will be out of tomorrow's game due to contract tracing.

How long will fourth-year junior wing Musa Jallow be out?

- I don't know how long he will be out, I don't anticipate a long-term situation.

Response to tough loss to Northwestern?

- Good. You don't have to be a Big Ten guru to look around the league and know that every team is

going to go through tough loss. It's part of being in a league that has nine teams in the top 25 and the depth that it has. You understand you have to play well. This group's been a really mature group. It's not going to be the only adversity we'll see.

Missing Musa?

- You don't like any of your guys to miss games. I understand why it's important in today's climate with contract tracing. It's unfortunate, but it's part of it.

What have you learned this year?

- There are a lot of things that I've learned that have been real positives. We have a really resilient group. That's a good sign, which is going to be necessary for us. I know we'd be a bit of a work-in-progress with guys coming back off injuries after not playing for a while. What can we take, good and bad lessons, from every game?

Staff dealing with this difficult year?

- I give them a ton of credit, just like I give our players a ton of credit. It's an absolute challenge for everyone involved. Nobody's complaining, it's just the reality. Going into game No. 10 is an accomplishment.

Fourth-year junior Justice Sueing's minutes have been going down, issue with not attacking the basket?

- His experience at Cal is completely different in so many ways, and we've talked about that. It was quite honestly a program that had had a tremendous amount of success. He took from that experience some things, but knew that this was going to be a step up. He's got to play stronger with the ball, make better decisions and get stronger in certain areas and be more committed. I don't look at this like other people do. We all understood that this was going to be an adjustment, especially in Big Ten play going against the toughest defenses in the country. He didn't have that experience in the Pac-12, not even close. He's just got to keep working and staying with a good attitude. I think it can be incremental growth. I love his coachability right now though.

Struggles of fifth-year point guard C.J. Walker and junior guard Duane Washington Jr.?

- They've got to adjust. Kaleb created a lot of openings for them last year. Both he and Andre created tremendous space and opportunities for those guys. They've just got to contribute to work. C.J. has been battling a thumb injury. If you go through and look at KenPom and the top defenses in the country, you're going to see a handful of Big Ten teams, if not all, as some of the best defenses in the country.

Hard for guys to find roles at this point and to find minutes for 11 guys at this point?

- Welcome to college basketball. Everybody has a roster of 13 guys or so who want to play. Those who stay ready can take on bigger roles. Our guys embracing their roles has been outstanding.

Anyone else out?

- Not at this point. It's day-to-day in this type of situation. And we'll see what tomorrow looks like for the availability of our entire team. That could change as well.

Sophomore center Ibrahima Diallo recovering from concussion?

- He's back and available to play.

Freshman guard Meechie Johnson Jr.?

- He's still got a way to go. He hasn't been initiated into practice yet. Just doing stuff on the side.

What is keeping freshman guard Meechie Johnson Jr. from being available?

- It's really trying to keep his best interest right now. He's coming off an ACL where he didn't play last year. And you're throwing him into full-contact practice with guys who have been training for 5-6 months. The last thing we want to do is rush him out there and put his health at any risk. It will be a while, and we will see when he will be ready.

How do you view senior forward Kyle Young shooting threes?

- The ones he has shot have really been ones that he has time and space. We haven't seen the payoff. But I think Kyle understands how effective he is as a player. He knows where he is at his best, and he has been fantastic for us the past few games.

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