

Ohio State Head Coach Chris Holtmann Discusses Seth Towns' Progress, Matchup With Morehead State



Coming off a 74-64 victory over UMass Lowell, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann spoke to members of the media ahead of a Dec. 2 (5 p.m.) showdown with Morehead State at the Covelli Center in Columbus via Zoom video conference Dec. 1.

Holtmann discussed a wide array of topics from his team's depth, COVID, Harvard transfer Seth Towns' progress, Musa Jallow's status, and the upcoming matchup with Morehead State. What follows is a bullet-point rundown paraphrasing what Holtmann said:

Concerned about lack of depth?

- No, I feel pretty good. I'm anxious to see some of our guys in live action. We were struggling offensively, so I felt that our guys out there needed to get into a rhythm. That's why there was a tighter rotation. It's going to be really important for us to have some depth this year for a variety of reasons.

Ibrahima Diallo?

- We'll see. I'm excited. I think he's taken some real strides, we've seen in practice. You can't play everybody. Zed (Key) has played some of those minutes right now. E.J. (Liddell) and Kyle (Young) play the forward minutes too.

C.J. Walker's biggest strength?

- Leading and running a team. Being the point of attack offensively and defensively, which I think he has to do a better job of than what he did the other night. C.J.'s going to be fine. I'm not worried about C.J. Walker in the least. He's hungry to grow and improve from one game to the next.

The last game was the 300th of your coaching career. Can you reflect on why you got into coaching?

- I was not aware it was game No. 300. I think it seems like game No. 1,000. You seem to age quite a bit when you slide over a chair. I saw a picture the other day of me at UNC Charlotte, and I don't think you guys would hardly recognize me. I've loved every moment of it. I loved this school. The most impactful things are the things that you guys don't see. It's the interactions that we have with our players.
- I was reflecting about a young man I coached early in my tenure here. He had an emergency situation with his mom. I was at that funeral, and I remember thinking afterward, I love competing, I love coaching, I love strategizing, I love player development, but this is why I got into coaching.

Musa Jallow?

- Musa will be out this next game. He continues to battle that lower leg injury.

Justin Ahrens?

- He's certainly a guy that I thought about. It was more of allowing those guys to get in a bit of a rhythm, as much as anything. But there's no question in my mind that he's our best and most consistent shooter on our team, and he'll have plenty of opportunities to show that. It wasn't just about shooting in that game; we needed to collectively attack a little bit better than what we did. Certainly, we missed some open shots and he'll help with that I'm confident.

Not playing in a holiday tournament, but instead at home?

- We've got a lot of respect for who we're playing. I expect to be challenged against Morehead State and their athleticism. I expect to be challenged like we were the other night (against UMass Lowell).
- Every game is an opportunity to learn and grow, and to be exposed in a few areas. We were exposed the other night and we have to improve off that.

COVID testing?

- It's similar across the board with every team that's competing here now. If we have a positive that's confirmed with a positive PCR, that's when the contact tracing begins. And then it's up to Dr. Jim Borchers and the medical staff to evaluate from there.

Seth Towns?

- The biggest thing for Seth is making sure that physically he's ready to go through live game action. He has been limited. I think everyone needs to understand he's not the same player or athlete he was his sophomore year at Harvard. He's made a lot of progress in his return. To expect that kind of production right now is unrealistic, and he understands that. Offensively, he'll have to shake some rust off there, but he's very gifted. Defensively, he's going to have to grow and get more confident in his knee and his conditioning. He's making progress. We're evaluating him on a day-to-day basis.

Handling COVID?

- We have thought about a lot of different scenarios. We feel like our guys have followed the specific guidelines of wearing masks and social distancing.

Can Seth Towns get back to his old form?

- I do believe he can get back to that. I just can't tell the future. We haven't honestly seen him enough in live action that I can even begin to speculate. It's unique. I have never coached a young man who has been out of competitive basketball for two and a half years. There is the transition of going from Harvard to the Big Ten, but that's just part of it.

Covelli Center?

- I'd prefer to play at our home arena. I'd prefer to play at the Schott. But when I get asked by our administration to save costs and limit the workload of changing the Schott over from ice hockey to basketball, I didn't say no. It's a great facility. It's beautiful. I'd like to be in our own facility and shoot in our own facility, but it made sense to play at Covelli.

Zed Key?

- We all know a guy or girl who is really funny without knowing they are funny. That's kind of Zed. It's one of his endearing qualities. And his teammates find the way he acts to be endearing and funny. What I noticed in recruiting is that he's a really smart guy from a good family and the basketball side of things. He's a different kid in that he has a lot of varied interests. He enjoys cars, he liked working on them and going to car shows.
- He's had offensive fouls in both games. The stuff that you guys don't see. Some of the ball-screen coverages and some of our other guys mix up, including all of our new guys. That stuff is a work in progress when implementing new players. We try to simplify it for him. If he continues to improve on those things, I think he can impact us in a positive way.

Ryan Day?

- I've thought a lot about Ryan and his situation. I know my wife and his have texted quite a bit. I have tremendous empathy. I know how much he cares for his kids. And I know he knows how much his players want to play games, and how much that weighs on him as a coach. All in all, they've done a different job and I'm optimistic the season will finish in full for them and he'll be back on the sidelines in short order.

Ball-screen coverages on defense?

- We got to get better at it. We've got to coach it better and play it better. It's such a big part of today's game. We were put in some situations that you give them credit for. Sometimes you feel like you prepared well, but you have to make some adjustments, which we did. We've got to get better in that area. I'm confident we will, but we have a lot of room to grow.

Scouting Morehead State?

- Morehead plays really hard. They've got a talented freshman big guy. They've got really talented guards. They play together well. Very much a competitive game against Richmond, and then they followed that up with a win over Arkansas State. They're well-coached and they've got a good

vision of what they want to do. They're the most physical team we have played.

- We're going to have to be physical as well. They've played a challenging schedule that has shown they have some really competitive guys and they have some fight to them. I think it will be our most physical game thus far by far.

Upset in second half with defense?

- That's stuff that you don't typically hear. I'd like to say that that's coaching. That's what happens. In any type of arena with normal noise, you don't hear those things on the regular. We just wanted to address some things in the timeout. It's unique playing in an empty gym. Your habits will control how you play. You heard us coaching.

Difference between Ivy League and Big Ten?

- It's a jump in athleticism and size. What you see in college basketball is there are really good players at all levels. I do think the consistency of the length and athleticism that you see in the Big Ten is just different. And you combine that with the system he's learning, that's a part of the adjustment. He was a part of a good, well-coached team at Harvard, and he'll pick it up well. But it's an adjustment.

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