

Ohio State Head Coach Chris Holtmann Previews Matchup At Notre Dame



The Ohio State men's basketball team won its first three games of the season as heavy favorites, but the Buckeyes will travel to South Bend, Ind., to take on an ACC opponent in Notre Dame on Dec. 8 at 7:30 p.m. on ESPN2.

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann spoke to members of the media via Zoom on Dec. 7 to discuss his team's progress in preparation for the Irish. What follows is a bullet-point rundown paraphrasing what Holtmann said:

- We're looking forward to this game on Tuesday. It should be a tremendous challenge. I've got a lot of respect for this Notre Dame team. I think they're going to have a great season. They are really skilled, they have good size, and they are really well-coached.

Does Notre Dame have an advantage since it already played a great team like Michigan State?

- It's possible that they have played one of the best teams in the country that that experience has helped them. Relative to our experience, could that give them an advantage? I'm really not sure.

Cancellation?

- We found out at the end of practice on Friday night. We finished practice, then we stretched and went over to the bleachers and I explained it to them. They were disappointed, but they understood. Because of testing protocols, it is difficult to add a game with that short of notice, because they need to have two days of clean tests to play.

Anxious to see how your team responds on the road?

- I'm really anxious to see how we will respond to being on the road together. It's been a while since we've been on the road (March). I'm anxious to see how we play a veteran team that's an ACC opponent with a talented group.

Did playing in the Covelli Center help prepare for you a road game?

- I don't know that it helped a lot necessarily. It was a different environment. I believe they will

have family and friends that can attend the game.

Graduate forward Seth Towns?

- As far as Seth is concerned, I think he is going to be a game-to-game and week-to-week decision. He's only been into practice about a week and a half now. It's going to depend on his confidence in his legs and his health. He sees the light at the end of the tunnel.

What are you looking to learn against Notre Dame?

- You're trying to learn how we respond together in a road environment. What's our level of connected toughness and physicality? How do our guys respond to playing a really good opponent and how they respond when they go on a run?

Senior guard Jimmy Sotos?

- He's getting better. He's practiced better. He's getting a little bit of a better feel. His progression will be a progression as the year goes on with his comfort level. He had a big moment when he hit that transition three the other day.

Team's maturity?

- I don't think you fully know your team until you go through the grind of a season and the ebbs and flows that happen. I like the maturity and the chemistry of this group. We have faced some adversity, but nothing like you're going to experience against the competition we'll be facing and playing in the best league in the country.

Advice to junior wing Justin Ahrens when he misses a few jumpers?

- Just keep shooting. Keep taking good ones. Stay confident in your ability to shoot. I was really happy to see him make those final three three pointers. He puts a lot of pressure on himself, so it was good to see him take a breath after hitting those.

Freshman wing Eugene Smith?

- I think his impact this year with this group will be defending multiple perimeter positions, rebounding the ball, and being ready when his offense is there. If he does that well, there's no question he can be a real asset coming off the bench.

Beating good nonconference teams last year?

- It's a different year because you don't have that summer and fall of your team being together as much as it has been in the past. Physically, we're a different team than we were last year as well. I think those guys can reflect on those games, and use that experience. Hopefully that will help us, but we'll see, though.

Most steady player on your team?

- (Fifth-year senior point guard) C.J. Walker. He's the most steady. He has his moments where he's got to make sure he's handling stuff the right way. Clearly, he's the guy who is the most

consistent with his approach when it comes to handling things emotionally, for sure.

Who has taken the lead on in-season rescheduling?

- David Egelhoff handles scheduling on our staff. This year is so different. What we try to do right now, Ryan Pedon has a lot of contacts because he is the friendliest assistant coach in college basketball, so we come together and plan things out.

Fourth-year junior wing Musa Jallow?

- He practiced yesterday, he'll be a game-time decision as well. He had some soreness the other day.

Do you like to play a team like Notre Dame ahead of the tough Big Ten slate?

- I may not feel like that in the midst of the game, but I think it's important to get that feedback early so you can learn what you have to improve on.

Sophomore forward E.J Liddell and senior forward Kyle Young shooting threes?

- Play to your strengths. I don't think either of those guys are defined by whether their three-point shots are falling or not. Kyle hit a big one in the game the other day.

Was Alabama A&M in Columbus before cancellation?

- They were here on-campus, and unfortunately, they had bussed here and got the call from our medical staff that the game wasn't going to be able to happen. I felt bad for them and I hope everyone is healthy there.

Will you fly or bus?

- We were tested this morning. We will bus to more games than we ever have and we will travel more on the day of games than we ever have. We're going to leave tonight after practice.

Photo courtesy of Dept. of Ohio State Athletics.

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