

Ohio State Head Coach Chris Holtmann Previews Rutgers Matchup



Coming off a tough loss at Wisconsin, the Ohio State men's basketball team welcomes Rutgers to Value City Area for a Wednesday (Feb. 12) night tipoff at 7 p.m.

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann spoke to members of the media about the upcoming game and bouncing back from a brutal loss to the Badgers.

- Really good Rutgers team coming to town. Deep and athletic, really well-coached. Top 25-30 team in the country in all the metrics.
- Sophomore guard Luther Muhammad's balance between staying healthy and playing physical? It's the same thing with he and junior forward Kyle Young; we're just really trying to figure out what they have to do to stay sharp and physically ready to play games. We're obviously really thin at a few spots, so we need their availability.
- Muhammad just has to keep working, plugging along. He's got to take good ones and has to remember who he is as a player, which is defensive-minded and aggressive first.
- Why is team's three-point defense better with junior big man Kaleb Wesson on the floor? Maybe some of that is that our offensive efficiency is better, so they're getting less transition threes. Defensive rebounding is better. Some ball-screen situations, where he provides more length and size as well.
- I think Kaleb's dealt with the spacing stuff that has impacted his efficiency. He would admit he has to finish through contact better.
- Against Wisconsin, Kaleb being out definitely affected us offensively and defensively, for sure. More so than it had in prior games, which is why I was more willing to have him on the bench, Hindsight I would have liked to get him back in earlier.
- We're a team that's still growing and still going through frustrations, and yet also some really positive moments. We've gone through some things where we're playing really confident and then you stub your toe. I don't want to make any judgments with so much basketball yet to be played. The bottom line in this league is they just keep coming. The talent and the quality teams just keep coming. I don't think we responded to the adversity of the game at Wisconsin.
- With your youth, do you still feel like you need to see how you grow? I think so, potentially. When you have a young player like freshman guard DJ Carton, who is our third-leading scorer, when you say those things, you're thinking about him along with some of our other young guys. We clearly saw his progression. Freshman forward E.J. Liddell has taken really good strides at times. Our

sophomores have had good moments.

- Biggest difference without Kaleb on the floor? We had errors offensively and defensively. We missed an open corner three. And we didn't get a couple of rebounds we needed in scrambles.
- Kaleb Wesson gives us something that no one else does, in terms of needing to get fouled. There were some correctable errors that we can change.
- Most of Rutgers group from last year is back. There is some consistency in year four of his program, where he has some of the guys that he wanted to recruit. They have some long, really good athletes. They've still got youth but they've got a mix of youth and experience.
- We're all disappointed with the game the other day. You've got to learn from it, though, and quickly put it behind you. You can't stay with it as players and coaches. We did some things in practice that were high energy, helping us turn the page. How resilient you are in this league says a lot about you. So much of that is determined by the leadership within your group. How do the leaders respond and how do they motivate the team to respond.
- You look at Penn State, and it's a credit to the administration, where they saw what they had with Pat and what he was building despite a lack of success. I think you see something similar with Rutgers, where there is a gradual improvement and they return a lot of experience.
- E.J. was in a really good groove, playing more physical and did some good things. The first half was not that, but he did some really good things for us in the second half.
- It's a great testament to the strength of the league. Very little turnover in coaches. Rutgers is a top 25-30 team in the country by nearly every metric, and Purdue is top 25-30 by most of the metrics. Last year, I said the Big Ten was the best league I had ever been a part of, and this year it is significantly better.
- I'd love to finish in the top half in defensive efficiency, but we've got a ways to go. It takes elite-level effort and consistency to be great in this league.
- You try to stay in the moment and stick with today. How do we prepare our guys the best? Make the next right play. To get too much outside of that can be too much for any of us.
- Freshman big man Ibrahima Diallo? He's got to continue to get better. He's always an option. He needs to stay ready. I'm not saying we will or won't use him, but he needs to be ready.
- Is it better to be commiserating together in Big Ten? There are a lot of teams struggling with consistency, not only in our league but across college basketball. It doesn't really make it feel any better, and it doesn't give you any more sleep. But there is a perspective that it is required.

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