

Ohio State Head Coach Chris Holtmann Previews Senior Night Showdown With Illinois



Coming off three straight wins against Maryland, Nebraska and Michigan, the Ohio State men's basketball team (20-9, 10-8) is heating up at the right time.

The Buckeyes will welcome Illinois (20-9, 12-6) to Value City Arena for a Big Ten battle on senior night.

Head coach Chris Holtmann previewed the Scarlet and Gray's showdown with the Fighting Illini in a March 4 press conference.

- Two terrific teams that are that are playing really well in Illinois and Michigan State.
- Illinois is playing really well, as most people expected. As we all remember a really good run late in the Big Ten season last year and just a really tough team, well-coached, talented. They have most everybody back, and the addition of obviously [freshman center] Kofi [Cockburn]. I think what wins in this league. Some veteran guys that have played a lot of games, well-coached group, really tough-minded team.
- Speaks to their effectiveness on the road how tough-minded they are so looking forward to the challenge of this one on Thursday night [March 5].
- A special night with our seniors, Andre Wesson and Danny Hummer. Both guys have love and care about so much and so happy for them.
- We're also honoring the 1960 national champion team, so a full night, and obviously our No. 1 focus is on a really good Illinois team and playing the best we can.
- Kyle Young? He is still day-to-day. His improvement has been incremental, and he is anxious to get back. We are anxious to get him back. It was a significant sprain.
- In particular, in a game like the two we have this week, Young adds a lot of value with what he brings. But you're also mindful of what's in the best interest of him and what's in the best interest of our team long-term as well.
- I'm really excited about the production we've gotten from from E.J. Liddell and from the guys.
- We've obviously played the shortest rotation I've ever played in my coaching career, but I think the reality is he adds a lot when it comes to those. Certainly teams like this that challenge you on the glass as much as these two do.
- Alonzo Gaffney? "Zo will be out, I can't really speak more to that but he'll be out for tomorrow."

- Timetable for Gaffney's return? I can't get into specifics on that.
- Ibrahima Diallo and Harrison Hookfin? Both guys could play. I entered the Michigan game, thinking they could play. They are working, they have had a great attitude and approach.
- Danny Hummer will obviously play because it's senior night.
- In this league, we're playing two of the better teams in the country. Illinois is a top 25 team. In this league, they just keep coming. There's never a break. There won't be a break in the Big Ten tournament and whoever we play in the NCAA Tournament will be a really good team, so you accept that and embrace that.
- We want to honor the seniors after the game, win or lose. And all the people who come to the game are welcome to hear the seniors' speeches if they'd like.
- Ever coached against anyone like Kofi Cockburn? I don't know - I never coached against Shaq. I'm not sure there's been a guy that is that specimen that I've coached against. 7-foot-1 [listed at 7-0], 290 is pretty rarefied air.
- It's the end of the year and you want to be playing as best as you can at this point. There is a lot of shuffling going on, so we're just trying to build upon the momentum we've built.
- C.J. Walker has made a step up in leadership and ownership. He has an innate leadership ability. He cares about the team, he cares about winning.
- Disparity in Kaleb Wesson's performances against Iowa's Luka Garza and Michigan's Jon Teske? There are parts of his game that you can look at and, whatever, complain about or take issue with. I look at it on the whole, as a coach. And certainly his two-point finishing is something that he would look at and say, 'Yeah, I can do better.' What gets lost by people who don't sit down and break down film and look at it is Kaleb was outstanding defensively [against Michigan]. He was really good defensively, and we just forget about that we see a big guy who we think should finish everything around the basket. We don't always look at the fact that he moves really well right now. He did a great job defending ball screens he protected the rim and the way that he can protect the rim which is a size in his length. He was great on rotations. Really, really had an impact. And then obviously, his efficiency from a three-point line was outstanding. There things that he can do better, that I can do better as a coach, but when you look at his game on a complete level. He played well, we've got to work with him on finishing more.
- Andre Wesson? He's an example of tremendous development and maturation as a player. Look at his numbers since he got here and they typify a hard-working improvement. His defense hasn't necessarily been what I thought because I hold him to such a high standard.
- My hope when I recruited Andre Wesson at Butler was that he could grow into a really good player on a really good team. Did I anticipate he would shoot 45 percent from three as a senior with a lot of shots? I don't know that's a high mark.
- I've enjoyed my interactions with the and their stories from the 1960 team. They are the lone national champion team. As much as I can, I'm trying to glean from that.
- When you were at Butler, were you wondering is OSU was ever going to offer Andre Wesson? I was wondering the same thing, if they were ever going to offer him. Once we pushed, pushed, pushed and didn't get enough of a response, I figured he was waiting for something else.
- What did you say to Andre once you became his coach? We had a laugh about it. I showed him my several of my texts that he didn't respond to when I got the job.
- Your relationship varies from player to player. As a coach you learn early on that it's your responsibility as a coach that you value them and their contributions regardless of how it may be perceived. Some of the guys I'm closest to are former walk-ons.
- Illinois? Defensively different. Play through Ayo still.
- Very good road team, tough-minded group. a lot of the same pieces from last year.

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

[divider line_type="Full Width Line" line_thickness="2" divider_color="default"] [nectar_btn size="jumbo" button_style="regular" button_color_2="Accent-Color" icon_family="none" url="http://www.buckeyesports.com/boards/" text="Join The Conversation"]