

Ohio State Head Coach Chris Holtmann Wants Players Outside Top Scoring Trio To Emerge On Offense



Through the first 17 games of the season, Ohio State established a formidable scoring trio of Battle (14.6 points per game), Roddy Gayle Jr. (14.1) and Bruce Thornton (16.8), a group that head coach Chris Holtmann's team has heavily relied upon to power them on the offensive side and guide them to victory.

Outside of the three Buckeyes, however, the team has gotten little production all year, with the next two leading scorers, forward Zed Key and center Felix Okpara, averaging just 8.5 and 6.6 points per game on a combined 4.8 shots per contest. This scoring disparity has only widened at the start of the New Year, with the team having just two players outside of Battle, Gayle and Thornton reaching double figures in scoring this month — that being Key and Okpara, who reached 11 and 10 points, respectively, in the team's losses against Indiana on Jan. 6 and Michigan on Monday.

Ohio State's major drop-off in scoring — combined with the recent shooting struggles of its top scoring trio — has emerged as one of the leading contributors to the team's January struggles. This is an issue that Holtmann sees as something that must be addressed if his team wants to return to their winning ways as conference play continues.

"We really do need some additional scoring from a couple of guys," Holtmann said on his weekly radio spot with 97.1 The Fan on Monday. "We need somebody to come up and give us 10 to 12 points. That's what you need in Big Ten play. Because (teams) are so keyed on your main guys. That's what we're looking for, is the ability to have some guys step up to do that."

While Key and Okpara have both shown that they are capable of reaching double figures on a given night, Holtmann pointed to some other players that need to step up and provide a much-needed lift for the group on offense.

The coach first listed freshman forward Devin Royal as someone who can provide a boost for the Buckeyes on offense. Despite averaging just 7.7 points per game so far this season, Holtmann said the first-year has shown significant signs of progress on the offensive end as the year progressed, a promising development that was evident in his efficient performance against Michigan where he netted seven points on 3-of-5 shooting in just seven minutes of action.

“He’s a guy that can provide some of that (offensive production), for sure,” Holtmann said. “I thought Devin gave us a great lift in the first half. I was proud of him. He did some really good things. His physicality and ability to rebound and finish around the basket are strengths. And I think you’re going to see that here in the next coming weeks.”

Holtmann also pointed to a player within his starting lineup as someone who will be asked to do more on offense — that being sophomore guard Evan Mahaffey, who has scored just 3.9 points per game this year. Holtmann said he thinks the Penn State transfer has increasingly become a weapon with his interior scoring, making him an important offensive weapon for the Buckeyes moving forward.

“I think he’s growing,” Holtmann said. “You see him going through some ups and downs, but we’re seeing some of his growth and confidence (come to light). He’s getting to his spots, and that was good to see. It’s exciting to see, he just has to keep working on his finishing.”