

Ohio State Head Coach Jake Diebler Leads Effort To Organize Charity Exhibition Matchups Between Ohio Programs



Four of the biggest college basketball programs in Ohio — Cincinnati, Dayton, Ohio State and Xavier — are each coming together this weekend to play a pair of charity exhibition games, with Ohio State heading to Cincinnati on Friday and Dayton hosting Xavier Sunday, but according to Bearcats head coach Wes Miller, the games would not have been scheduled if not for the efforts and leadership of Ohio State's Jake Diebler.

Speaking on a joint Zoom call with Diebler on Oct. 16 to discuss the matchup, Miller said the first-year Ohio State head coach was the driving force behind getting these four flagship Ohio programs to compete against one another in a charity exhibition setting by organizing a joint Zoom meeting between the respective head coaches, those being Diebler and Miller along with Xavier's Sean Miller and Dayton's Anthony Grant.

"Before all the rules settled out, there was talk about being able to play these types of exhibitions," Miller said. "And to me, it just makes sense to have a chance to get in an environment against a great program to prepare you for your season...So we were reaching out to those programs locally — so we didn't have to get on a plane — that we thought would help us develop and grow.

"I might have reached out to Jake about that, and he's the one that said, 'No, let's think about this in a bigger way. Let's get involved with the charity. We did this with Dayton last year, and let's get all four programs involved.'

"I give Jake a lot of credit (for) trying to figure out a way to not just continue to do something like (a charity exhibition), but to make it bigger and better," Miller said. "He got all four schools, Xavier, Cincinnati Dayton and (Ohio State) all on a Zoom. To wrangle four head coaches is hard in his own right. He got that organized to try to see how we could all participate together. And so I give him a lot of credit for that."

As Miller alluded to, this is Diebler's second time being involved in a charity exhibition game against an in-state opponent. Last October, when Diebler was an associate head coach for former Ohio State head

coach Chris Holtmann, Ohio State took on Dayton at UD Arena in a charity exhibition that aimed to raise awareness and education of mental health and wellness in adolescents and young adults.

Diebler said seeing the impact of last year's event — which also raised money for "Jay's Light," a mental health and suicide prevention initiative created by Grant in honor of his late daughter, Jayda, who died in May 2022 following a two-year battle with mental illness — compelled him to get even more schools on board to help support the cause, something he was able to do this fall.

"I got to see firsthand last year just how impactful Ohio State going to Dayton could be," Diebler said. "It was certainly a competitive game, but I think both of our programs were able to keep the main thing the main thing, and that's raising some real awareness and resources to support the communities in the mental health space. So when you now have an opportunity to bring all four of these programs together and enhance that, I think it would have been foolish not to try to do that."

Diebler also thought he had an obligation as Ohio State's head coach and Ohio native to get all four Ohio teams playing each other for the continued advancement of college basketball within the state.

"And then the other part of it for me, someone who grew up in Ohio and is a product of the basketball culture, to get these four programs together, it just made too much sense," Diebler said. "Being the head coach at Ohio State, I believe you have a responsibility to keep pushing the basketball community to grow, and anything we can do to help that in our state is important."

With both contests this year likely being a success and raising thousands for mental health initiatives, both Diebler and Miller said they have not ruled out expanding this to a four-team regular season event, that is if they can ensure all schools can commit to the same charity-based mission in future matchups.

"Wes and I are both on board. And I think all four of us are on board to figuring out a way to continue this," Diebler said. "But I also don't want to lose our ability to impact the community with this game," he added. "And how that comes into play in a regular season game, that needs to be discussed too. As much as we're going to benefit from this as a team, and learning about our team, still the most important part of (the exhibition), and I think this weekend in general, is the four of our programs coming together, the impact that's going to have in our state.

"I don't want to lose sight of that. If we can do that in a regular season game, and it fits the intricacies of scheduling and things, I think we're certainly open to talking about that. In the immediate future, I think we have to continue to enhance a weekend like this, and make it as big and resourceful as we can."