

Ohio State Men's Basketball Coach Chris Holtmann Addresses COVID-19, Transfers, Expectations And More In Teleconference



Ohio State head men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann spoke with members of the media, including Buckeye Sports Bulletin, during an April 14 teleconference.

The Buckeye coach entering his fourth season at the helm addressed the COVID-19 pandemic, the large numbers of transfers from his program and the excitement surrounding the team moving forward.

The only transfer Holtmann could speak about was Harvard transfer Seth Towns, but the coach expressed his excitement for not only the transfers but also the improvements he expects from his returning players.

What follows is a bullet-point breakdown of what Holtmann had to say during the teleconference, which lasted about one hour and 15 minutes:

- Holtmann began by sending out thoughts to everyone dealing with COVID-19.
- Includes Paul Loggan AD at Indy North Central, who passed away, and Louisville 247 writer Jody Demling, who is in recovery.
- And it's impacted so many around the world economically. And we're certainly trying to do our part here to mitigate some of those really challenging times that we have here. And I know you know, some of your colleagues, you're going through furlough. So we think about all you guys appreciate you guys coming out and being a part of this and we think of those that maybe we're not able to be a part of today.
- We feel good about the season. To win nine of our last 12 in the deepest league in the country says something about how we were playing. We obviously had some struggles in January, but we're able to respond to that well. We had a great start to the season, a difficult January and then to respond like we did.
- One of six teams top 20 in offensive and defensive efficiency in the country.
- Those numbers certainly don't guarantee you anything but I think when you're one of six teams to be in the top 20 of those two numbers, it certainly says you have a real chance to advance. We all

know the unpredictability of the NCAA Tournament. And I'm not here to make any crazy claims, but I certainly did feel confident about our ability to perform well, and to give ourselves a chance to really advance in the NCAA Tournament. And given the numbers, I think that they certainly back that up.

- "We saw significant improvement and growth from our second year to third year in those numbers."
- "We have a number of guys who have played significant minutes in Big Ten play. Six of seven returning players played significant Big Ten minutes (Justin Ahrens, Musa Jallow, E.J. Liddell, C.J. Walker, Duane Washington, Kyle Young).
- We will really count on those guys to take the next step in their overall development."
- We are excited about our freshmen Eugene Brown and Zed Key.
- Holtmann said what most knew, that Kaleb Wesson plans to remain in the NBA Draft.
- And we fully support that Kaleb had a tremendous year for us as did his brother. Those two guys will be significant losses for us. No question about it, both Wessons will be significant losses for us. We really, really support Kaleb.
- C.J. Walker also was wanting to go through the process of kind of gathering information. But I don't want anybody to overreact. He fully expects and plans to come back and lead our team, but I think that's a right that every player has and we support him in that to just kind of gather information. I think C.J.'s doing a little bit of what Kaleb did last year in terms of gathering information.
- "I believe he's really committed to this process, as we expected he would be." Chris Holtmann on Kaleb Wesson declaring for the NBA Draft.
- Asked about players transferring who are contributors:
- "I just think it's a variety of different reasons. Generally, players in those situations they want a situation where maybe they are playing a different position. Maybe they want more shot attempts or more of something. That's where a lot of this (stems). I don't think there is anything else beyond that."
- You could probably go back and and look at studies where that has worked out well for those that transferred, and then you could certainly find a significant number where it did not work out as well or in fact worked out less in their favor.
- It is certainly true that in a number of those situations, the coaches are of the opinion that you know what, it probably is best for both. And I'm not talking specifically on any specific situation but throughout my number of years that's usually the case.
- Holtmann says his new routine is to work out in morning, have conference call with staff in morning, then number of calls to set up academic support, talk to players, parents, recruits, incoming players, recruits, etc.
- Holtmann just talked about his make-shift home gym he set up. "Think about any of the Rocky movies" and that's pretty much what we're talking about.
- Time with family has been great.
- "I love my family and I love going to work. I love my work, I enjoy coaching and I love our guys."
- On number of transfers:
- "I don't know that those numbers would be outside of my ideal. I wouldn't look at that and say it's ideal or not ideal."
- Holtmann: 13 transfers started for Final Four teams last four years, in the spread between 2004-07 there was only one, who was Ron Lewis at Ohio State.
- "Roster management is a critical part of your job now. I don't see it changing anytime soon."
- "The bulk of our roster and the bulk of our rotation will be with typical four-year players or the high school recruit. But there will be some years where you have more incoming transfers than

others.”

- “We are always looking for ways we can do better. I would think moving forward those numbers won’t be at that level.”
- “We’ve had a run here of adding a couple players unfortunately I can’t speak about, except for Seth (Towns), I feel as good about this roster as I have about any roster leading into the off-season.”
- Asked if he wanted any of the guys to stay:
- “D.J. (Carton) and Luther (Muhammad), I don’t really want to get into specifics. I wish them well. You look at how do the pieces fit and what is best moving forward. Sometimes it’s best moving forward for younger guys to grow into increased roles and sometimes there is some movement that needs to take place.”
- Alonzo Gaffney is considering pro jump.
- Regarding Seth Towns:
- “Seth is obviously a mature young man having graduated from Harvard. That is a tremendous honor and a tremendous accomplishment. He brings a maturity and has been coached really well. (Harvard coach) Tommy (Amaker) and his guys do a great job.
- “His shooting is big for us. He has to get to a place of full health. Provided that happens, we are very excited about what he will bring in the next couple years.”
- Strength coach Quadrian Banks has sent home workouts for the guys to do on their own
- “It’s not the same as being here and being monitored by Coach Q (Quadrian Banks).”
- Holtmann said the players are really excited about next year and their roles. He said the players support the guys that left but are excited about the group moving forward.
- Duane Washington Jr.’s role will be “significant.”
- “Part of the normal things that happen with your roster is guys emerge. What we saw this past season was Duane emerge in a lot of ways, particularly offensively. He played well when we played him with the ball in his hands a little bit more. He is still growing into who he is as a player. There is a lot of room for growth with him. We have to pull it out of him. That is our role as coaches.”
- Holtmann said he went back and watched 2012 Final Four game vs. Kansas.
- Also saw 2007 national title game vs. Florida, will look for other games in that run as well.
- Chris Holtmann said E.J. Liddell and his mom go to E.J.’s high school track to run together during this time. He said the team has sent home workouts to players.
- Chris Holtmann said former NFL coach Tony Dungy told the basketball team stories about Peyton Manning and Marvin Harrison among other things on a zoom call yesterday. Holtmann said the players remember Manning, but not Harrison.
- “He’ll have to transition to Big Ten basketball. It’s different than the league he came from (Pac-12).”
- But he’s motivated and obviously, he has to get healthy but he will.
- It was great to have him around and it was really great when we could when he was in practice because we began to see some of the things that we were going to see next year.
- Holtmann said Justice Sueing is terrific at getting to the paint and defenders have a hard time keeping him in front of them.
- Did not expect D.J. Carton to be a four-year play, so there are already contingency plans in place in those cases. With players wanting to professionalize earlier, there are more transitions with rosters.
- Holtmann admitted there is a concern with the new players coming in and attempting to build on-court chemistry given the uncertainty right now. He said all programs are going through something similar.

- Holtmann said Ohio State has had three good years and believes the Buckeyes could have taken the next step in terms of the postseason this year.
- Holtmann said the coronavirus pandemic has impacted the players recovering from injuries. He said everything has taken a back seat but the players are still rehabbing virtually and there are limitations on that. Holtmann said he thinks all of the guys will recover.
- This is going to be a major concern everywhere. Players can rehab on their own but it's not quite the same as working directly with a doctor or physical therapy.
- Compared notes with Ryan Day and Urban Meyer on how to handle a hiatus like this.
- Once a week, we have a zoom meeting. And it's just our way of touching base with our guys, collectively, and I think they enjoy that too. They were in great spirits yesterday, they enjoy kind of at least getting reconnected for a minute. I try not to keep them too long.
- I just was really excited and in some cases, curious about what we could have been. We had our flaws; I'm not delusional, but I do think we had a very good way about us. So I thought about a lot more in the last couple of weeks really than in the first couple weeks, which was I think more about trying to assess where we were at and where we weren't moving forward now that I've had a chance to take a step back. I thought a lot about what it could have been.
- Asked about recruiting one-and-done players, Holtmann said (as he has before) that it has to be the right fit with his program.
- We lost our two best perimeter shooters percentage-wise in both Wessons, and they were certainly two of our better defenders and they provided great length for us. So we are going to look differently and be a little bit different.
- But I think what you hope as a coach is that your guys in your returning program, develop and take that next step. And that's what we saw in guys last year. We saw Kaleb (Wesson) take another step, Andre (Wesson) take another step. Duane (Washington) took another step, C.J. Walker grew as the year went on. And E.J. took a tremendous step in the season, Kyle Young was beginning to take another step. I think Justin (Ahrens) would have been healthy. So that's that has to happen moving forward and then the addition of those guys with experience will help us.
- We're going to be playing differently offensively and defensively, there's no question to us because while Kaleb - you can be a really good rim, rim protector, and not necessarily be a prolific shot blocker - and I think that that's what Kaleb was. And so was his brother, he was a tremendous at protecting the rim with his wall up.
- So, we have to play a little bit differently, for sure. We're gonna have to play how we defend the post probably a little bit differently, as well as some of the things we do in on-ball screen coverages.
- And listen, I get it. It's a major question mark for us, moving forward, how we're going to answer that. There's a lot for us all offensively and defensively. So that'll be obviously an offseason challenge for us moving forward.
- I do think that E.J., even though he's a forward, provides some rim protection and then Kyle (Young) is going to have to get better at that and then, our young, some bigger guys, they're going to have to help us there.

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