

# Ohio State Officially Parting Ways With Head Men's Basketball Coach Chris Holtmann



Ohio State officially announced on Wednesday afternoon that they are parting ways with head men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann, ending his seven-year tenure leading the Buckeyes. The move comes after the Buckeyes dropped their 16th-straight road game Tuesday night at the Kohl Center, falling to Wisconsin 72-64.

Associate head coach Jake Diebler will serve as the team's interim head coach for the remainder of the season.

"I want to express my appreciation toward Chris for the first-class program, and the well-respected program, he has run here at Ohio State," Smith said in a release. "He and his wife, Lori, are wonderful people. I thank each of them for their seven years here in Columbus and I wish them well."

Holtmann, 52, was hired by athletic director Gene Smith on June 9, 2017, to succeed longtime coach Thad Matta, who led the Buckeyes to two final four appearances, nine NCAA tournaments and five Big Ten regular season championships during his 13-year run.

After leading Butler to three straight NCAA Tournament berths and a combined 70-31 record from 2014-2017, the then-45-year-old Holtmann carried that coaching success over to his early years at Ohio State. Holtmann amassed a combined 107-54 record (.664 winning percentage) in his first five seasons and took his team to the NCAA Tournament each time it was held, a winning stretch that earned him a three-year contract extension from Smith in May 2021.

Holtmann secured several personal and team accomplishments during these first five years, mainly taking home the 2018 Big Ten Coach of the Year Award after leading the Buckeyes to a 25-9 overall record and No. 2 seed in the Big Ten regular season standings, and developing standouts such as Malaki Branham, Keita Bates-Diop and E.J. Liddell into NBA Draft picks. But those five seasons were also marred by a lack of success in the NCAA Tournament, with the Buckeyes failing to get past the

Round of 32 in all four of his appearances in the Big Dance, including an upset loss to No. 15 seed Oral Roberts in the first round of the 2021 tournament.

Despite the admirable start, Holtmann's time as Ohio State's head coach took a turn for the worse beginning in 2022-23. With the Buckeyes losing Branham and Liddell to the NBA in the offseason, Ohio State jumped out to a 10-3 start in the nonconference before losing 14 of its next 15 conference games and missing the NCAA tournament for the first time in the Holtmann-era with a 13-19 overall record.

Ohio State's struggles — particularly in Big Ten play — continued into the 2023-24 campaign, with the Buckeyes again starting strong with a 12-2 record before dropping nine of its final 11 games in conference play, a stretch that included four double-digit losses and multiple second-half collapses.

"I think it's frustrating for everybody," Holtmann said on Feb. 6. "It's obviously been a really hard stretch for all of our players and coaches."

Holtmann's last two years as head coach — which included a 9-25 Big Ten record and a 16-game road losing streak that dates back to Jan. 1, 2023 — ultimately prompted Smith to make a change at leadership just 21 months after he gave Holtmann an extension. Holtmann's firing also comes at a time of change in leadership at both the academic and athletic level, with the school hiring Walter "Ted" Carter as their next university president and Smith handing over the reins to former Texas A&M athletic director Ross Bjork on July 1.

With the firing coming before April 1, the university will owe Holtmann the \$12.8 million remaining on his contract.

Holtmann finishes his seven-year run at Ohio State with a 137-86 record (.614 winning percentage) and a 3-4 record in the NCAA Tournament. There are currently no updates on who the university will target to become the program's 16th head coach, but a release said that the search for a new head coach will begin at the end of this season, with Bjork — who will begin work at Ohio State on March 1 as a senior advisor to Smith — leading the charge.

*Buckeye Sports Bulletin will have more on this breaking news story as news unfolds.*