

Ohio State Preparing For Yet Another Hostile Environment At Creighton



Playing in front of hostile crowds has become the norm for Ohio State over the last year.

The Buckeyes played in primetime games at Purdue, Indiana and Penn State last season, winning two of the three en route to a second place finish in the Big Ten.

This season, Chris Holtmann's team opened the season on the road against Cincinnati and came away with a 64-56 win over the Bearcats before routing Purdue Fort Wayne at home, 107-61. For the second time in three games, the Buckeyes will play in hostile territory as they travel to Omaha, Neb. to take on Creighton.

The Bluejays are coming off of a 21-win season in 2017-18 which ended in a first round exit from the NCAA Tournament at the hands of Kansas State. Creighton, much like Ohio State, is going through a bit of a roster transition.

Greg McDermott's team returns just two starters from last season and features just two seniors. However, the Bluejays rarely lose when playing in the friendly confines of CHI Health Center, posting a 215-44 record since its opening in 2003.

"It's one of the hardest places I have ever coached in," Holtmann, who went 1-3 in games at Creighton as the head coach at Butler, said Wednesday. "It's a fantastic environment. That will be a great experience for our guys. The atmosphere will be a challenge, certainly."

Outside of Ohio State's four freshmen, the Buckeyes have repeatedly been tested with tough environments as college basketball players. Graduate transfer Keyshawn Woods has perhaps been exposed to the most intimidating of venues, having played as the visitor at both Duke's Cameron Indoor and North Carolina's Dean Smith Center.

Woods, who played for two years at Wake Forest in the ACC, will be someone young players can lean on in moments of adversity, especially on the road.

"Leadership for our group is an ever evolving thing," Holtmann said. "I think that Keyshawn is poised to have a real impact on that end."

"You've got to be solid. We have to stick with our game plan," Woods said when asked how OSU should handle intense environments. "When teams go on runs and the crowd gets into it, you have to take the crowd out of it. We have to stay connected as a group. As long as we stay connected as a group, we can win in any environment."

Sophomore big man Kaleb Wesson said the loudest road environment he played in was Ohio State's upset win over Purdue in February.

"When we played Michigan State (in Columbus), even though it was on our side, I was like, 'Woah, it's loud in here.' Then we went to Purdue and I was like, 'Wow. I haven't heard loud before,'" Wesson said. "Stuff like that makes you love (the challenge)."

Ohio State is set to tip off against the Bluejays on Thursday at 7 p.m. The game is scheduled to be televised on Fox Sports 1.