

Ohio State Women's Basketball Puts New Emphasis On Overseas Talent



From Ohio State women's basketball head coach Kevin McGuff's second season in 2014-15 to the end of the 2017-18 campaign, there were a few similarities that each of those teams shared.

Firstly, it was the reign of Kelsey Mitchell, who broke a multitude of records during those four seasons on the way to winning three Big Ten Player of the Year awards. In this stretch, she was helped by a core of Sierra Calhoun, Asia Doss, Linnae Harper and Stephanie Mavunga that reached four straight NCAA tournaments, but fell short of making the Elite Eight each time.

There was also another thing that those four rosters from 2014 to 2018 had in common: every player on the team came from the United States. With Mitchell, Mavunga and the rest of Ohio State's starting five all set to graduate, McGuff knew a rebuild was underway, so he looked internationally to help fill the void left in their place.

And that, along with a variety of graduate transfers and some U.S. commitments from Janai Crooms and Aaliyah Patty, led to Ohio State signing forward Dorka Juhasz out of Pecs, Hungary.

"She was a really good fit from the standpoint of we had a great run of teams and we were sort of in a quick rebuild," McGuff told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "She could kind of come in on the front end of that and really be an important part of our program from day one, which she was last year, and then you saw her blossom even more this year."

Juhasz was one of three European players on Ohio State's 2019-20 roster, as she was joined by Nitra, Slovakia forward Rebeka Mikulasikova and Pamplona, Spain forward Aixa Wone. That trio of players out of Europe was tied for the most in the Big Ten with Minnesota and represents a shift in mindset for where Ohio State is searching for talent.

"There's a lot of really talented international players coming to the United States to play," McGuff said, "so we've just kind of taken a philosophy a few years back that we didn't want to miss on the opportunity to get some talented kids in the program, so we started looking at this more closely."

When starting off looking internationally, there is an added layer of unknown when it comes to initially finding players that are worthy of looking deeper into, and eventually sending out an offer to.

McGuff said a lot of the European prospects that Ohio State has recruited initially came almost on accident, with he and his staff attempting to watch some American talent play in some tournaments overseas.

“(Recruiting internationally) coincided with more tournaments where teams from the United States, let’s say a young USA basketball team, was going and playing abroad,” McGuff said. “Like we’re going to watch them anyway, so why not start to investigate some of these international students while we’re there? And so that’s kind of how it started.”

To read the full story on how the women’s basketball team focused on talent overseas, subscribe to the print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. For four free issues, no card required, sign up at the link here: <http://www.buckeyesports.com/subscribe-4issue-trial/>