

Ohio State's Focus Remains On Continued Growth In The Face Of January Struggles



Prior to the 2022-23 season, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann preached patience in regard to his roster, which included 10 new pieces — headlined by the additions of five freshmen and three scholarship transfers.

It appeared that there wouldn't be any need for patience during the season's first two months, however, as the Buckeyes amassed a 9-3 record entering January. However, that steady momentum entering Big Ten play quickly vanished during the first month of 2023, in which Ohio State finished with an 11-10 mark, including a 3-7 conference record at the halfway point of the Big Ten slate.

"In a lot of ways, I understood that there were going to be some challenges given the newness of the team and the youth that he decided to go with," Holtmann said on Monday. "Obviously, you're disappointed with the first round of Big Ten games. I think there have been some moments where we've had an opportunity to capitalize and we just haven't been able to do that.

"Certainly, you go into a season like this and you do understand that like any team, but particularly one with the makeup of ours, was going to have some challenges."

Ohio State was 2-7 during the month and saw distinct statistical dropoffs offensively, with its shooting efficiency dropping from its 49.4 percent mark, during the first two months of the season, to 42.7 percent across the last nine games. The Buckeyes also saw their scoring average fall from 81.7 points per game to 69.9 during the January stretch. A reluctance to share the ball has also crept in, with Ohio State's assist averages falling from 14.4 assists per game during nonconference play to 9.7 dimes per contest in January.

The offensive dropoff, compounded with Ohio State's season-long issues defensively — where it ranks tied for ninth in points allowed in the Big Ten by giving up 67.7 points per game — have contributed to the Buckeye slide.

“Offensively, the ball has to move more, and it has in stretches. I’d like for us to shoot a little bit better and probably take a few more threes than what we’ve taken,” Holtmann said. “Generally, our defense, our transition defense, and our team defense, I thought had taken some strides but it took a step back in the Indiana game.”

With 10 games remaining in the regular season, Holtmann said the focus remains on growing in those specific areas he laid out with the hope that Ohio State can bounce back from the difficult start to the conference slate.

“I wouldn’t necessarily put a number on that because I think you can get lost in the macro and the big picture of things,” Holtmann said. “Right now, I can tell you that we want to improve in specific areas, like rebounding and a few other areas.

“It’s hard not to be disappointed with the first 10 games of league play, so our challenge is: let’s finish this, obviously, in a way we feel good about.”

Although Ohio State’s goal of returning to the NCAA Tournament currently sits in jeopardy, as a result of the Buckeyes’ adverse January stretch, Holtmann said he’s not ready to label the campaign as a lost season.

“I don’t want to make too many statements about the season when we have 11 games left,” Holtmann said. “Let the story be written. Let’s see how much better we can get and grow and how much better can improve, and that’s our focus right now.

“I certainly wouldn’t want to do an autopsy of the season with 11 games to go.”