

Projecting Ohio State's 2022-23 Lineup With Justice Sueing: Power Forwards



Ohio State fifth-year senior winger Justice Sueing is returning to Ohio State after missing all but two games in the 2021-22 season. He announced his decision to come back to college basketball on April 6, and his intention to do so at OSU on April 7, so the Cal transfer can now officially be factored in projections of Ohio State 2022-23 roster.

A 10.7 PPG scorer on 49.1 percent shooting who added 5.5 rebounds per contest in 2020-21, Sueing provides a huge spark to an Ohio State lineup losing seven players to graduation, the NBA draft, or transfer and could prove even more important if freshman point guard Malaki Branham sticks in the draft as currently anticipated. But as it stands in early April, who will be lining up around the veteran leader of head coach Chris Holtmann's sixth roster in Columbus?

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PF: *Justice Sueing (5th-Sr., 10.7 PPG, 5.5 RPG, 2.6 APG in 2020-21); Kalen Etzler (R-Fr., No. 156 overall prospect in 2021).*

This is a bit of an unconventional power forward room, but it's likely the one the Buckeyes will need to roll with unless the transfer portal can provide a plug-and-play replacement here. And with the departure of Meechie Johnson Jr. to transfer, it seems Ohio State's limited scholarship resources will be spent at point guard, not down low. West Virginia transfer Jalen Bridges, Ohio's Ben Vander Plas and NC State's Manny Bates could change that, but if those three land elsewhere it seems Ohio State could just roll forward with the players it has in the frontcourt.

The return of a healthy Seth Towns could change this a bit, but he's yet to make an announcement on his intentions for 2022 and he hasn't played a season without facing injury problems since 2017-18. A 6-8, 230-pound sharpshooter would be quite the addition to this bunch and throws a serious wrench into the lineup projection, but projecting that is being very optimistic, at this point. His return changes the two-deep here insofar as he replaces redshirt freshman Kalen Etzler in the second string, but Towns filling a starting job is something that needs to be seen to be believed at this point in his career.

That leaves the top role at power forward to Sueing, who *is* returning and who *has* played healthy basketball recently. He missed nearly all of the past season with a lingering groin injury, but he competed in three full seasons prior to that without issue and shouldn't be considered an injury risk at this point - especially with a full offseason to recover. Barring a serious setback, he should be ready to lead the Buckeye attack in the wake of Branham and E.J. Liddell's departures.

Yet, he could do so from a bit of a new spot this winter. Sueing grew into a small forward role at Ohio State after working as a tweener guard at Cal, and could shift again out of necessity with of the roster around him. He's 6-7, 215 pounds - not huge by any measure, but not unheard of in a stretch 4 role. Liddell played with about 25 pounds on him last year but wore it well and looked much closer to 215 in the way that he moved and played than he did 240. Kyle Young, Ohio State's de facto grinder down low, was 6-8, 225 pounds. Sueing is not a traditional power forward, but he wouldn't be blown off the ball if he's asked to play a role somewhat resembling that this season.

That's the second thing to note with this projection. Sueing is projected here as a power forward because positions need names, but Ohio State hasn't used an orthodox power forward in several years. Liddell spent plenty of time on the perimeter and Holtmann has shown comfort with a four-out offense before. With a true big-man rotation at center between Zed Key and Felix Okpara - neither of whom are expected to do much of anything on the perimeter offensively - a similar system would make a lot of sense here. It would make for an adjustment defensively, but Sueing's offensive skill set and responsibilities really wouldn't need to shift all that much to slot him in here.

And as detailed in the small forward projection, it's either him, Eugene Brown III, Key or one of the freshmen. A move from Key forces Okpara into a starting role and gives Ohio State a frontcourt that's both tremendously thin for depth and lacking in any kind of perimeter threat. Brown played some power forward a season ago, but he's no bigger than Sueing and didn't exactly light the world on fire with his post defense.

The other option here, again assuming that the transfer portal is a longshot and that Towns isn't likely to return to form, would be a major step from Etzler. The former three-star redshirted in 2021 as he worked to develop his body to handle the rigors of Big Ten basketball, and though he should be able to contribute as a rotational player this season, that would be quite the leap to expect from a player who was always considered to be a multi-year project.

Ohio State has had success with small-ball in the past. It may not play perfectly in the big-heavy Big Ten, but the big-heavy Big Ten doesn't play well in March. Perhaps bucking the orthodoxy isn't a bad thing, especially if a team can play "small-ball" with three 6-7 players in the middle slots of the lineup, a tremendously strong center and a yet-to-be-named player at point guard.

Of the portal options named thus far at that spot, South Carolina's Jermaine Cousinard is 6-4 and considered a capable defender, West Virginia's Sam McNeil is 6-3 and cuts a similar profile, ECU's Tristen Newton is 6-5, Kansas State's Nijel Pack is just 6-0 but has active hands, Bellarmine's Dylan Penn is 6-3 and Illinois State's Antonio Reeves is 6-6. The Buckeyes might now have a Greg Oden on this roster, but that hypothetical small-ball lineup isn't particularly small.