

Ohio State Now Awaiting Final Decision From Hare

Etzler Gives Buckeyes Verbal Commitment

By Mark Rea

Ohio State basketball coach Randy Ayers has received a verbal commitment from Convoy (Ohio) Crestview point guard Doug Etzler, recognized as one of the best players at his position in the country.

Etzler, a 6-0, 155-pounder who averaged 22 points and 11 assists last year, told Ayers he would sign with the Buckeyes during the NCAA's early signing period which begins Nov. 14.

Making up his mind during his official campus visit Oct. 26-27, Etzler said he has always wanted to play at Ohio State.

"I was really impressed with all the players and the coaches," he told BSB. "Plus, it's been a dream of mine to be a Buckeye. It really didn't take much to convince me."

Etzler turned down offers from Ohio University and Bowling Green to play for the Buckeyes. He also turned away overtures from several out-of-state schools, telling them he wanted to remain in Ohio to play college ball.

While Etzler was visiting the OSU campus, so was another highly rated Ohio talent, 6-9 forward Chip Hare of Massillon Perry.

Hare said his campus visit "went real well," but he was not quite ready to give a verbal commitment to any school.

"I got a good point of view about Buckeye basketball," he told BSB. "I visited along with Doug, and we had a really good time. It was really a lot of fun."

"But I haven't made up my mind on any school yet. I will definitely sign early, but I don't have any time frame on when I will make an announcement."

Hare said he had scheduled a meet-

ing with his parents, Perry head coach Larry Wilson, and school administrators for Oct. 30 to get their input on the matter.

His final choices have been narrowed to Ohio State, Dayton and Wake Forest. Hare also visited Northwestern, but eliminated the Wildcats from the running.

Both Etzler and Hare have qualified for freshman eligibility under Proposition 42. Etzler carries a 3.78 grade-point average and scored 20 on the ACT. Hare has a 2.90 grade-point average and also scored 20 on the ACT.

Ohio State has four grants to offer this season. Two are left over from last year and two more will open when seniors Perry Carter and Treg Lee use the final year of their eligibility this season.

In addition to Etzler, the Buckeyes also have a verbal commitment from Columbus Eastmoor's Antonio Watson. The 6-9, 210-pound forward gave OSU his oral commitment Oct. 17.

The Buckeyes are also committed to 6-7 power forward Ricky Dudley of Henderson, Texas. The Buckeyes recruited Dudley last season, but he failed to meet Prop 42 requirements. He is currently enrolled at Fork Union (Va.) Military Academy, where he is continuing his studies and attempting to achieve a minimum score of 18 on the ACT or 700 on the SAT.

While the Buckeyes continue their pursuit of Hare, they are no longer in the running for 6-7 forward Will Macon of Pittsburgh (Pa.) Perry Traditional.

Perry Traditional head coach Chuck Franklin confirmed that Macon had dropped Ohio State from the running for his services.



Doug Etzler



Chip Hare

"Ohio State had already received commitments from two other forwards, and Will decided that it was in his best interests to go somewhere else," Franklin said.

Franklin confirmed the two forwards to which Macon was referring are Watson and Dudley.

Teams left in the running are Kentucky, Xavier and DePaul. Kentucky is said to have the inside track.

Two other Ohio prepsters have given

verbal commitments to other schools.

Marco Pikaar, a 6-10 center from Xenia Beavercreek, has committed to Dayton, while Dave Grim, a 6-7 forward from Massillon Washington, will be attending Minnesota.

Meanwhile, Purdue got a verbal commitment from 6-9 power forward Glenn Robinson of Gary (Ind.) Roosevelt. National recruiting expert Bob Gibbons has rated him the number one prep player in the nation this season.

Skelton Gets NCAA OK To Play This Year

By Mark Rea

Ohio State freshman guard Jamie Skelton has received clearance from the NCAA to play for the Buckeyes this season.

The 6-2 guard from Dayton Meadowdale needed NCAA acceptance of a tutored English course to meet the required 2.00 minimum grade-point average to qualify for freshman eligibility under Proposition 42.

The NCAA originally questioned whether or not the tutored class would be accepted. If the course had not been accepted, Skelton would have had to sit out the 1990-91 season as a Prop 42 student, forfeiting one year of his college eligibility.

Skelton appealed the decision and received word Oct. 17 that the NCAA had accepted the tutored class.

During the appeal, Skelton was not allowed to practice with the Buckeyes, currently preparing for season-opening exhibitions against a Soviet Union club team Nov. 13 and Athletics In Action Nov. 19. The regular-season opener is Nov. 25 against Bethune-Cookman in St. John Arena.

"The best thing about the whole thing was that Jamie missed only two days of practice," said OSU head coach Randy Ayers. "Obviously, we're pleased to get this resolved. Now Jamie can concentrate on basketball."

Skelton's cause was aided by Dr. Franklin Smith, superintendent of Dayton Public Schools. Franklin provided the NCAA with information about the tutorial program available to all students in the system.

"The English class the NCAA had questioned is a tutorial class in which every student in the Dayton Public School system has a chance to participate if needed," Smith said. "There was, quite frankly, no problem whatsoever that we could see."

"The student completed the work in the class, received a passing grade, and received his diploma at graduation exercises."

Skelton is expected to add depth at the off guard position for the Buckeyes this season.

He is an excellent outside shooter and gives OSU an excellent three-point threat.

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OSU Expects Big Things From Small Freshman Guard

Etzler Surviving Well In Big Man's Game

By Rich Leonardo

To say that basketball is a big man's game would be obvious.

In an era in which teams boast of 6-9 point guards and 7-foot forwards, the small man has become somewhat of an anomaly. Despite this rarity, however, Ohio State has discovered that good things still come in small packages, and the Buckeyes' good thing has arrived in the shape of 6-foot freshman Doug Etzler.

"Doug is an overall solid player and, in fact, I don't think he has any glaring weaknesses in his game," said OSU assistant coach Dave Cecutti. "Now, at the level of play in the Big Ten, he's somewhat weaker than the opposition, but still, he's an outstanding shooter, a good penetrator and a smart individual on the court."

Despite Cecutti's shining appraisal of Etzler, he has seen only limited action

this year in 10 games while averaging 0.7 points and 1.4 assists per contest. Despite those less-than-spectacular numbers, Etzler is pleased with his progress.

"I think I've progressed pretty well over this season," he said. "I've learned a lot about the system and have become a more fundamentally sound player at both ends of the court."

While Etzler strives to become a more sound player, it's surprising to some that his progression is even taking place at Ohio State since he seemed destined to continue his basketball and his education at a much smaller school.

"I've always wanted to be a Buckeye," Etzler said. "You never know what you can do until you give it a shot. And while it's true that I haven't played much this year, I'm hopeful that next season I'll be able to contribute a lot more."

OSU head basketball coach Randy Ayers has his own opinion of why Etzler chose to become a Buckeye.

"One of the challenges I think Doug liked about our program was the opportunity to play against quality guards every day like Mark Baker, Jamaal Brown, Alex Davis and Jamie Skelton," Ayers said. "Plus, Doug enjoys a good challenge and he knows his time will come. He needs to continue to work hard and if he does so, I expect good things for him."

Good things are what the Convoy, Ohio, native brought Crestview High School during his prep days there. As a senior, Etzler was named first-team all-state and the Ohio Division III player of the year, averaging 22.8 points and 11 assists per game. For his career, Etzler shot an outstanding 60 percent from the field and 90.2 percent from the free-throw line.

While not getting ample opportunity to see if his prep prowess could transfer to the college court, Etzler still forges ahead.

"I think this year of experience will really pay dividends next year," Cecutti said. "What he's learned as far as our system and also how he's learned to handle himself on the court will both be very important to his success next year."

His contributions to the Buckeyes this season have been seen in small



Doug Etzler

measures. For example, he played only one minute during OSU's 93-78 win over Northwestern March 7. But into that minute, Etzler managed to squeeze in two assists and one rebound.

His past successes have shown up as points on the scoreboard, but as an OSU point guard, that will most likely change.

"When I was a freshman in high school, I was not looked upon to score," Etzler said. "So the situation I'm in now seems similar to me since my duties are

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to distribute the ball, handle the ball, penetrate the lane and play good defense. However, doing those chores doesn't mean I can't score. If the good shot is there, I'll take it."

Armed with confidence, Etzler shows no fear of competing against the high profile players in the Big Ten, and his confidence is contagious.

"All of us on the staff have enough confidence in Doug to feel comfortable with him in the game, even a big game," Cecutti said. "We know he won't make many mistakes and while he may not make a ton of things happen, he will always be solid."

The staff's confidence in Etzler held true when the young guard saw action in OSU's big 68-58 road victory over Michigan earlier this year.

"That minute and a half he played up at Michigan was during a crucial part of the game," Ayers said. "Doug went in there, took care of the ball and initiated our offense pretty well, so we were very pleased with him."

Ayers wasn't alone in his pleasure. "Getting into that Michigan game was a real confidence booster for me," Etzler said. "You know practice is one thing, but playing in an important Big Ten game was a great feeling. You have to get in there and see what you can do."

While Etzler's stint against the Wolverines may have bolstered his confidence, it's his daily battles in practice with Baker that are building his future.

"I think Mark is one of the best guards in the nation right now," Etzler said. "So my playing against him every day in practice only serves to make me the absolute best player I can possibly be."

As Baker plays his final games for the Buckeyes, it would appear as if Etzler might be his heir apparent.

"We're losing a great perimeter player in Mark Baker after this season," Cecutti said. "So there's definitely a place for Doug here."

A place for a diminutive point guard in the land of the giants? Buckeye fans

are quick to remember another small man who showed the Big Ten and the rest of the country that height was no match for heart.

"I think a lot of people looked at Doug and sort of expected him to be another Jay Burson," Cecutti said. "Well, Doug can be a scorer, but he really concentrates more on his total game. When you watch him during practice, you see how hard he works both offensively and defensively, but comparing just about anybody to Jay is unfair."

"After Doug spends some serious time in the weight room, he'll have no problem making a name for himself."

To be the next Burson is an impossible task, but Etzler already knows that.

"At first, I heard a lot about being like Jay, but really, we're two different types of players," Etzler said. "Jay was much more of a scorer than I am and the way I play is to pass first and score later. I really think our sizes have more to do with the comparisons than anything else."

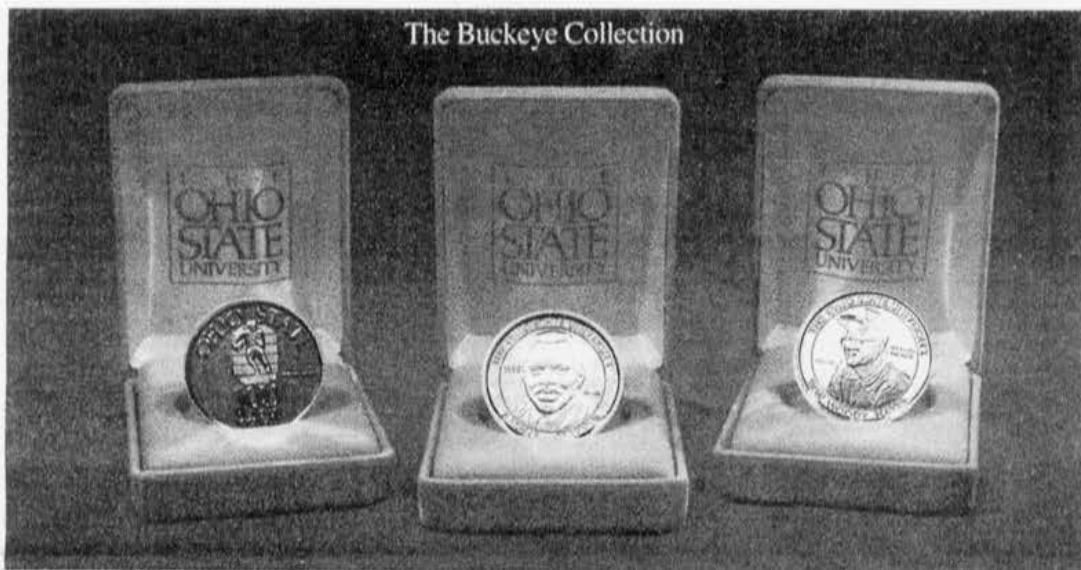
While he did not aspire to be the next Burson, he did have some things he wanted to achieve in his first season.

"This year, I wanted to learn the system here and really understand both

the offensive and defensive schemes being taught," Etzler said. "Any playing time this year has been a bonus because I really assumed this year would be a learning experience for me and next year would be my time to see action."

While next year might be Etzler's entrance into playing time, this year might be an introduction into prime time.

"We want to win the Big Ten championship," Etzler said. "That's been our goal from day one and whether or not that happens, we still expect a high seed in the tournament and hopefully a trip to the Final Four."



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OSU Sophomore Adjusts From Being Starter To Reserve Role

Etzler Stays Ready As Backup Point Guard



Ohio State sophomore point guard Doug Etzler has been able to adjust to his role as both a starter and a substitute this year. Through Feb. 6, he was averaging 3.1 points and 1.9 assists per game. He was also leading the team in three-point percentage.

By JEFF RAPP
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Playing prep basketball in a tiny town such as Convoy, Ohio, Doug Etzler was the kind of guy who was easy to overlook.

Sure he was a town hero, leading Crestview High School to new heights while being named the state's Division III player of the year his senior season. But at 6-0 and a slender-appearing 170 pounds, not many major college recruiters came knocking on Etzler's door.

Ohio State head coach Randy Ayers, however, saw the potential of a floor leader and much-needed player with a point guard mentality when he welcomed Etzler last year.

"He's a coach's son, and he plays that way," Ayers said of Etzler, who averaged 9.7 assists per game during his four-year prep career. "He makes good decisions on the floor. You've got to like a kid like Doug who works hard and understands what you want from him."

"And when Doug stays aggressive on the floor with the basketball, he's very productive for us."

Etzler's reluctance to put the ball up has drawn the only major complaint from coaches. Ayers begged him to shoot when open in practice last year, something the point guard tried to improve on heading into this, his sophomore season.

He was named as a last-minute replacement for Jimmy Ratliff — who was enrolled in classes during the summer quarter — to play with a Big Ten all-star team that toured Europe. Under the direction of Northwestern head coach Bill Foster, Etzler had gone from a player who turned in just 50 minutes as a freshman to a key component of a talented squad.

"I think it was a real good experience for me to be fortunate enough to go over there and represent our team," said Etzler. "I think it helped me a lot as far

as gaining a lot of experience and a lot of confidence. It helped me from a standpoint of playing in actual game situations, and I think I played about half of each game; so I got a lot of minutes."

Etzler started six of seven games on the European tour and averaged 7.3 points per game on the trip, but he still managed to turn in a few double-digit scoring efforts.

"I went over there with the attitude that I was going to get my shot if it was there. I wasn't going to be too bashful," he said. "I was fortunate enough where we were running a type of system where we were up and down and I was getting a lot of good looks at the basket."

"I also had the opportunity to play the two guard position instead of the point at times and I think that opened up a lot of things for me as far as some of the other players penetrating and kicking it back out to me. So I did have the opportunity to score a little more."

The trip to Europe also provided Etzler with other memorable moments. His roommate for the two-week trip was Iowa forward Chris Street, who died earlier this year in an automobile accident.

Street's loss numbed many, including Etzler, who lost a newfound friend.

"He was the epitome of a hard-working kid that had certain goals in his head and he tried as hard as he could to achieve them," Etzler said. "It makes you wonder why the life of someone like that had to end because he wasn't 21 yet and he had a great future ahead of him."

After returning stateside a renewed player, Etzler used what he had learned overseas and battled former, current and future Buckeye teammates in the Worthington Summer League.

Then his upward mobility was further rewarded when Ayers named him the Buckeyes' starting point guard heading into the 1992-93 season. He held down that spot in OSU's first 14



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games, scoring 51 points and recording 32 assists. But with OSU in the midst of what became a six-game losing string, freshman Greg Simpson was given a shot at the point.

Since then, minutes or numbers of any kind have been rare on Etzler's stat sheet, but he has not moped about the decision.

"Greg had been playing well all year," he said. "He was giving us more productivity and getting us in the offense as well as I had been; so it was a good move. We needed more offense and a little bit more quickness on defense. It's something I've dealt with pretty well because I'm still working hard."

A Jan. 26 trip to Michigan marked Etzler's first game on the bench. He ended up staying there all game as Ayers had to contend with match-up problems with the Wolverines, most notably 6-8 point guard Jalen Rose.

Etzler said he expected to deal with such games because of his lack of height.

"When people talk about me being too small, it makes me work even harder," he said. "I came here knowing I was going to be in a lot of situations where I was the smallest person out on the floor."

"I didn't look at it as a disadvantage, just more as a challenge. Plus, when you're out there playing, you don't get caught up in that. I really don't even notice it until I see a picture next to everyone else and I realize how small I look."

Etzler's schoolboy appearance has been a benefit as well. Eyes of opposing point guards often light up when he checks into a game. That is, until Etzler ties those same players in knots by dribbling through his legs and around his back and starting the offense in a blink.

"I do kind of enjoy that," Etzler said. "There are times I cannot only see that look in their eyes like they think they can strip me, but a lot of guys will tell me that. It feels good to handle that because it helps me show I can play on this level."

"I don't mind it because when you overlook someone, that's usually when you get beat."

Some people speculated that overlooking Etzler was exactly what Simpson did when he first got here, but the two-time Ohio player of the year said that was not the case at all.

"My first impression of Doug was he was a great leader," Simpson said. "He understands the game well and I really looked up to him for that when I first came here."

"He's helped me a lot because he's helped show me the things that I can do."

Even though Simpson has an edge in talent in most everyone's mind, Etzler gives him quite a battle in practice.

"He's fun to practice against because he's a great defender and he loves the game," Simpson said. "I could never knock on his game because Doug's a great spot-up shooter and he's a real good ball handler, too. So he's an ideal guy to pressure me and I try to pressure him, too."

But again, the one edge Simpson has is his ability to look for and take his shot.

"We'd like Doug to be able to create off the dribble, maybe not for his shot, more in terms of drawing defenders toward him with more penetration," said OSU assistant coach Dave Cecutti.

When asked where Etzler's jump shot ranks with fellow Buckeyes once he does let it fly, Cecutti said, "There's

no question he's got one of the best strokes on the team. He's definitely a good pure shooter."

The stat sheet backs up that statement. Despite shooting only around 41.0 percent from the floor, Etzler is a reliable long-range gunner. He has made 11 of 23 three-point attempts, good enough for 47.8 percent, the best three-point percentage on the team.

"I don't think it's a matter of not wanting to create my own shot; it's just been a situation where I don't have a lot of good looks at the basket," he said. "I don't want to force anything or take a bad shot when someone else might have had a better shot."

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Guard Busts Out With 37 Points Against George Mason

Etzler's Time As OSU's Leading Man Arrives

By RICH LEONARDO
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Webster's Dictionary defines leadership as being the quality of a leader as well as having the capacity to lead.

For the Ohio State men's basketball team, leadership is defined simply by the presence of senior guard Doug Etzler.

"Doug has done a good job being a leader both on and off the court this season," OSU assistant coach Dave Cecutti said. "He's kept everyone together and everyone working hard to achieve our goals, which, of course, are to be as competitive as we can be and to win as many games as possible."

Etzler, a role player for much of his first three seasons with the Buckeyes, has stepped to the forefront this season. For instance, few OSU players have ever enjoyed the game Etzler had against George Mason on Jan. 8 at St. John Arena.

Etzler led the charge in OSU's 121-96 win by notching career highs in points (37), assists (10), rebounds (six) and three-point goals (eight). Etzler, 12 of 15 from the field and eight of 11 on treys, was clearly in the zone against the Patriots.

But, for the 4-7 Buckeyes, the George Mason game is an early high-water mark. Winning often during the Big Ten season might prove to be an improbable task. However, staying competitive seems a given if hustle and effort account for anything.

"We've been up and down this year, especially in the area of putting together two complete halves of basketball," Etzler said. "Yet I feel there's been a couple of games that we should have won, but we just weren't able to finish as strong as we should have. Overall, though, I think we're learning a lot and we're coming together as a team."

Learning is something Etzler has been doing a lot of lately since he has switched positions from point guard to shooting guard this season.

"The switch to shooting guard really wasn't that much of an adjustment for me since I knew coming into this season that I'd be changing positions," Etzler said. "Plus, I prepared for the switch by playing the off guard position during my play in the summer league as well as falling back on my high school experiences, where I was looked upon to be a scorer."

Over his first three years as a Buckeye, Etzler averaged just 2.3 points per game. But through 11 games this season, he is averaging 17.7 points per game. His average was boosted almost

two points by the George Mason game. He is also shooting a healthy 51.8 percent (29 of 56) on three-point tries.

"Doug has made the adjustment to changing positions with minimal problems, and I think you can look back to his high school career and see that he was a more than capable scorer," Cecutti said. "So consequently, we're looking for him to really step up and hit some big shots for us, and I think he's comfortable with his new role as well."

For the 6-0, 175-pound senior, there is no time like the present to get comfortable shooting the ball.

"I think I've been playing pretty well, although I know I need to provide a little more leadership, and when I do that, I believe we'll start pulling out some of these tight games," Etzler said. "But overall, I guess I feel I'm doing the job I'm expected to do."

One job Etzler never imagined he'd have to do was compete without the supporting cast of would-be juniors, Derek Anderson, Gerald Eaker, Charles Macon, Greg Simpson and Nate Wilbourne, who have all either left the program or were dismissed from it.

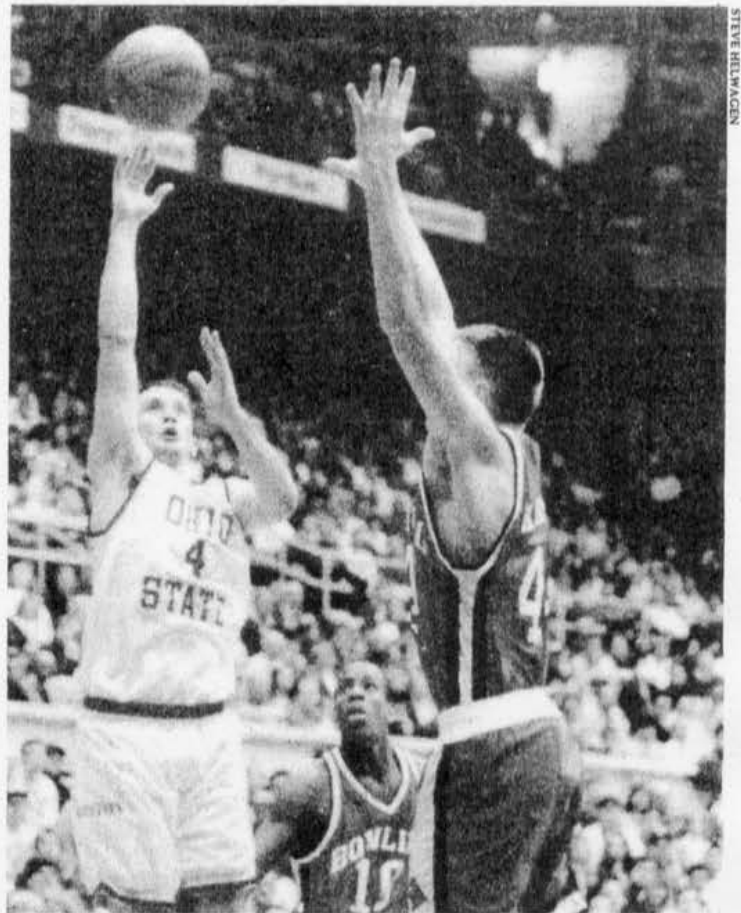
"The saga of last year's team just seems to be one unfortunate incident after another," Etzler said. "In reality, we lost our entire junior class and by the time it was all over, the recruiting season was also over, so we've had to put a team together with a lot of walk-ons this year and consequently, we've been struggling. Yet despite having some rough times, we are trying harder than ever and we will continue to improve."

The loss of guards Anderson and Simpson virtually assured Etzler of a starting job and an opportunity to finally showcase all of his skills, but even if the departed Buckeyes had stayed on, Etzler still would have played a major role on this year's team.

"Doug would have come into this season and had an outstanding senior campaign no matter what," Cecutti said. "He's a smart player and he knows how to adjust to any situation. One thing about him is that he'll always do whatever he can and whatever is necessary to help this team win."

Winning is something Etzler experienced early on as it was during his freshman season that the Buckeyes captured their second straight Big Ten title and yet another trip to the NCAA Tournament.

"I've certainly been through quite a series of changes since I arrived here," Etzler said. "I mean, as a freshman I came in and was part of a team that included Jim Jackson and Chris Jent, and



PUTTING UP THE SHOT — Ohio State senior guard Doug Etzler puts up a shot between a pair of Bowling Green defenders during the Dec. 22 game at St. John Arena. Etzler had career highs in points (37) and three-pointers (eight) against George Mason.

we made it to the final eight in the NCAA Tournament.

"Since then, we've never returned to the tournament and I'll tell you, despite seeing more playing time since that first year, I've never experienced more enjoyment than I did as a freshman. Winning is the greatest feeling and I really don't care if I ever score a single point as long as we're winning," he said.

Success and winning are qualities Etzler grew up with as he played for and starred for his coach and father, Ray Etzler, at Crestview High School in Convoy, Ohio. As a senior, Etzler was named the Division III player of the year in Ohio when he averaged 22 points and 11 assists per game.

Yet despite his impressive prep credentials, Etzler was viewed by many as being in over his head at Ohio State and that coming from a small school, he could not possibly compete at a major-college level.

"People sometimes place judgments too early on young players and I think they should wait until that player has been in the program a few years before they decide if he has been successful or not," Cecutti said. "Doug has been successful academically, socially and on the basketball court. He's the type of player and person that we hope to always recruit and who always shines a positive light on the Ohio State basketball

program and on the university as a whole."

Etzler is hoping for a positive light to beam down on the Buckeyes this season, but he knows that victories are the only way to garner that illumination.

"When you're winning, everything is better," Etzler said. "People like you more, the media like you more and you never have to worry about playing in front of a less than sold-out St. John Arena. I really don't feel it's fair to this year's team that we're not getting the support we deserve. You can bet that next year, when all the new recruits come in, that the fans will be back in droves."

"I really wish they'd come out and back us now because we are giving it all we've got and with some support, maybe we could gain some important momentum that can really make a difference down the stretch of a close game," he said.

"I'd like to be remembered as a player who always went out there and gave it all he had," Etzler said, "while also being a player who always did his best to keep his teammates involved and under control. Now, if I can hit a few memorable shots along the way, great. But no matter what, I will have never given less than 100 percent."

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