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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

June 2017

## Time For A Change

## OSU Freshman, 2018 Commit React To Matta's Departure

 By RYAN McGLADE  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer


TIM MOODY

COACHING CHANGE – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith (left) announced June 5 that Thad Matta (right) was no longer the Buckeyes' men's basketball coach.

## Matta Out As OSU Hoops Coach After 13 Years

 By TIM MOODY  
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

When the Ohio State men's basketball team opens the 2017-18 season, Thad Matta will not be the head coach.

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith announced the decision to make a coaching change during a press conference June 5, just a matter of months after giving Matta a vote of confidence before the 2016-17 season ended. Matta's career in Columbus came to a finish with a school-record 337 wins and program-high 460 games coached.

"While this may be a surprise to many, I think it is the right thing for our program, at the right time and we will go about the business of going through a national search immediately," Smith said.

Smith explained that he and Matta came to a "mutual understanding" that the program needed to go in a different direction.

Matta, who coached the Buckeyes for 13 seasons, was visibly emotional during the press conference, but he stressed that he was thankful for his time at Ohio State.

"I'm thinking about where my emotions are, and there is a song that says, 'Sometimes the light shines brightly on me, other times I can barely see. Lately it has occurred to me what a long, strange trip this has been,'" Matta said, referring

to Grateful Dead lyrics. "Obviously, this has been probably the greatest 13 years of my life. Just looking around here and seeing all these things, it's been awesome.

"My wife, my two daughters, they have been with me at the top and at the bottom. I think from Gene to (President Michael) Drake to (former president Gordon) Gee to (former AD) Andy Geiger, Buckeye Nation, it has been an incredible run.

"Most importantly I want to thank the players. We have had some good ones. Those are the guys that get the job done for you, and I am grateful to them. Thank you."

Matta added that he understood Smith's decision but said that didn't make the conversation easy.

Matta, a Hoopeston, Ill., native, originally came to Ohio State in July of 2004 after Geiger fired Jim O'Brien for giving money to a former OSU signee named Aleksandar Radojevic. Matta had previously spent the 2000-01 season as the head coach at Butler and the following three years at Xavier before being hired by the Buckeyes.

His Ohio State career included a pair of Final Four appearances in 2007 and 2012 and a loss to Florida in the national title game in '07. The Buckeyes also made three Elite Eights and five Sweet 16s under Matta's guidance in addition to

Kaleb Wesson's first day on campus as a member of the Ohio State men's basketball team was certainly a memorable one. It happened to be the same day that Thad Matta was let go as the head coach of the basketball program.

Though the center out of Westerville (Ohio) South was taken aback by Matta's dismissal, he noted that he must keep chugging along.

"It was definitely a surprise, but life goes on," Wesson told BSB shortly after Matta was let go. "Not to say that I don't care about him getting fired, but coaches get fired every day and you still have to be productive in whatever you do."

Wesson's older brother, Andre, was a freshman at Ohio State last season. Kaleb Wesson said he discussed with his older brother the news regarding Matta, and the siblings had a similar perspective on it.

"We just talked about how – like what I said – life goes on and you still have to go to work every day," Wesson said. "People don't quit their jobs because their boss gets fired."

Wesson added that he and his brother were not aware this was coming.

"This was news to us just like everybody else," he said. "I didn't know it was happening today."

The younger Wesson, who signed his letter of intent with Ohio State back in November, noted that he had not even started considering other college options.

"I didn't look at it that way yet," Kaleb Wesson said. "It's a family decision if anything. So I have to talk to my parents about it and they're at work. I haven't really thought about going anywhere else or even putting into thought that I'd go anywhere else. I'm still a Buckeye."

Coming out of high school, Wesson was rated by Scout.com, the parent network of BuckeyeSports.com, as the No. 80 overall prospect and 15th-best center in the 2017 class. His advice to preppers of future recruiting classes who are committed to Ohio State is plain and simple.

"My message would be if you committed to this school just because of the head coach, you came for the wrong reason anyway," he said. "At Ohio State it's about the culture, and it's not just on-the-court stuff. The coaches are a major reason why you go to school but you don't see them 24/7 out of the day. You're around them a lot but you still live a regular life on campus and you still make connections on campus. If they committed to be Buckeyes, they shouldn't stop the commitment because of a coaching change."

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Charter Member

# A Lot Went Into Matta's OSU Departure

A word of caution to the next high-profile coach at Ohio State: Beware of directors of athletics bearing votes of confidence.

During a March 2011 news conference OSU athletic director Gene Smith stated that he stood behind head football coach Jim Tressel as the so-called Tattoo-gate scandal began to take wing. Less than three months later, Smith asked for and received Tressel's resignation.

Apparently, three months is about the shelf life for a vote of confidence emanating from the Ohio State athletic department.

Smith announced June 5 that Thad Matta was out, bringing to an end the 13-year tenure of arguably the most successful head coach in the history of the university's men's basketball program. That announcement came less than three months after Smith had indicated that Matta would return for the 2017-18 season.

"I am confident in (Thad's) leadership to return the program to the winning ways that we have all enjoyed during his 13-year tenure," Smith said March 9, interestingly nearly five years to the day from when the AD told reporters, "I think everyone knows how I feel about Jim Tressel. There is no better coach at developing young people than Jim."

Before you argue that it's an apples-to-oranges comparison between Tressel and Matta, I get that. I understand why the university felt it had to fire Tressel, although one of the reasons given at the time was because it might help mitigate any NCAA sanctions the football program might have faced. Obviously, it did not.

I long ago came to grips with Tressel's ouster even though I continue to believe had the coach courted the fancy of certain well-heeled boosters, influential board of trustee members and a certain swath of the Columbus news media, he might have weathered that storm five years ago.

But Matta cut a much different figure.

While Tressel was a micromanager in every way imaginable, Matta was more of a big-tent coach. He was exuberant and accessible, seemed equally at ease with a prospective recruit as he was with the president of the university, and cultivated a media savviness that helped him navigate around and through a number of rough patches during his tenure.

Many of the posts on social media the day of Matta's ouster were slightly different takes on the same meme: "Nice guy but it was time for him to go." In other words, 11 years of success was wiped out by the two most recent seasons of underachievement. Woody Hayes once famously said, "Fans are fickle," and one may presume the legendary coach wasn't just talking about football fans.

The simple fact is that Matta being a nice guy doesn't mean much in today's world of college and professional sports. You would be hard-pressed to find two bigger horses' asses than Nick Saban or Bill Belichick, yet you cannot argue with the success each has enjoyed.

Perhaps there is something to the old "nice guys finish last" adage.

## Unparalleled Level Of Success

I remember when Matta was introduced as head coach at Ohio State in July 2004. It was a news conference full of hope, and I remember the youthful face, the omnipresent chewing gum, the dark suit and the buckeye in his pocket. I also remember the raging tire fire of a program he inherited from Jim O'Brien and the NCAA infractions and postseason ban that were to come.

Yet Matta somehow managed to squeeze a 20-12 finish out of his team that first season, a campaign punctuated by the regular-season finale at Value City Arena when senior Matt Sylvester's three-point bomb with 5.1 seconds remaining gave the Buckeyes a 65-64 upset of top-ranked Illinois. That victory signaled that Ohio State was poised to return to center stage, both in the Big Ten as well as college basketball at large.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

The next season, that statement became even more emphatic when the Buckeyes returned to the NCAA Tournament to begin a run of nine tournament appearances over the next 10 years. Before Matta arrived in Columbus, Ohio State had played in the tournament only nine of the previous 21 seasons.

Along the way, Matta's program strung together a four-year run during which it posted a 123-27 overall record that included three Big Ten regular-season championships, an equal number of conference tournament titles, two Elite Eight appearances and one trip to the Final Four.

Matta won more games than any other coach in program history and earned five Big Ten championships, but more than that, he went about his business the right way. In an era when some fans are happy with NCAA infractions every few years so long as there are a couple of national championship trophies hoisted along the way, Matta ran a program that never had the slightest hint of impropriety. Additionally, he raised the graduation rate of the program from 20 percent when he took over to 88 percent.

In other words, everything being fair, Matta earned the right to go out on his own terms. But make no mistake. He was not afforded that luxury. No matter what it was called, or how it was spun, it was not a retirement. I can't conceive that it was Matta's plan to ride off into the sunset at this particular time. It was purely a business decision based upon the perception that the coach could no longer recruit at a five-star level.

The recent news of the departure from the program by JaQuan Lyle wiped out the only player remaining from the five-man recruiting class of 2015, and when Cincinnati Princeton wing Darius Bazley – acknowledged as Ohio's top prospect for 2018 – withdrew in April his commitment to Ohio State, it appeared that Matta had indeed lost the magic that lured such stars as Mike Conley, Greg Oden, Evan Turner and D'Angelo Russell as well as Daequan Cook, David Lighty, Jared Sullinger, Jon Diebler, Kosta Koufos, William Buford and Aaron Craft to Columbus.

In Smith's own words, the recent failures on the recruiting trail facilitated a change in his thinking from three months ago.

"We had a good plan going into the summer (and) recruiting is a major part of that plan," the AD told reporters. "We weren't winning the battles in recruiting that I thought we might have a chance to win, as (Thad) did. And so, as we started talking about that (during a meeting three days before the announcement), the flow of

the conversation took me to the reality. ... And I said, 'Thad, maybe it's time to make a change,' and he agreed."

Maybe the coach agreed, but his frayed emotions were clearly on display as was a rounded face bearing the lines of a man who has battled excruciating pain in his back, leg and foot for the past 10 years.

Matta tried several times to interject a bit of lightheartedness into the proceedings, joking with several media members as well as borrowing the "what a long strange trip it's been" lyric from the Grateful Dead song "Truckin'" to help describe his tenure.

Appearing in a blue blazer and open-collared white shirt – no scarlet or gray, whether intentional or not – Matta clearly wanted to portray a man comfortable with what had happened. Except he didn't look completely comfortable – especially when his voice repeatedly cracked while talking about his wife and daughters.

Matta conceded that "we've dealt with some major negativity in recruitment ... and we were battling some things we couldn't overcome," alluding to the fact that opposing coaches were using his health and tenuous coaching future against him.

Still, while Matta volunteered that he "completely understands" the decision Smith made, I got the sense that, despite what was said by his boss, he didn't necessarily agree with it.

At one point, when asked if he thought he would still be head coach if not for his health problems, Matta replied, "Yeah," before pausing briefly to add, "Probably."

## Who Will Be The Successor?

Before Matta got in his car to leave Value City Arena following his "retirement" announcement, pundits had already put together a list of potential successors, a list that included everything from the sublime (Sean Miller of Arizona) to the practical (Chris Mack of Xavier and Mick Cronin of Cincinnati) to the ridiculous (former Indiana head coach Tom Crean).

The reality of the situation is that Ohio State might not be able to attract a so-called big name to replace Matta. While the perception of the program might be that Matta elevated it back to elite status, the cold truth of the matter is that the Buckeyes are six years removed from their last Big Ten championship and feature a roster chock full of underachieving or less talented players.

Not that those facts would deter any up-and-coming coach, of course. But whatever enterprising young man decides to become Matta's successor should understand where his new program stands. Matta knew basketball always ran a distant second to Ohio State football, but that never seemed to bother him the way it did some of his predecessors.

Likewise, Matta never complained that the attendance figures for his program were mainly due to the building in which his team plays its home games. It wasn't his fault the university built the Schottenstein Center in an out-of-the-way corner of the campus that wasn't close to anything when it was built, and nearly 20 years later, still isn't close to much of anything.

Before he signs on the dotted line of any multiyear contract, the next coach of the Ohio State men's basketball team should be mindful of those things – that and insist upon a clause prohibiting votes of confidence.



# Recruiting Played A Role In Matta's Departure

Continued From Page 1

winning five Big Ten regular-season crowns and four more league-tournament titles.

Over the past few years, the program took a step backward in terms of on-court product. In 2014-15, Ohio State finished the year with a 24-11 overall record but struggled to an 11-7 mark in league play. The Buckeyes made it to the second round of the NCAA Tournament that year before losing to Arizona, 73-58. That proved to be Matta's final appearance in the Big Dance as Ohio State's head coach.

The following year, Ohio State went 21-14 and lost to Florida in the second round of the National Invitation Tournament. After the season, three members of Ohio State's five-man recruiting class from 2015 opted to transfer from the school and a fourth – Austin Grandstaff – had already left for Oklahoma during the regular season. The fifth member of that 2015 class, guard JaQuan Lyle, quit the team following the 2016-17 season.

Matta's final season in Columbus was his worst, record wise, as the Buckeyes finished 17-15 overall and 7-11 in the Big Ten last season, missing out on non-Big Ten tournament postseason play entirely.

Matta's success at Ohio State was largely based on recruiting. The Buckeyes made the 2007 title game with a freshman class that included one-and-done stars such as Greg Oden, Mike Conley and Daquan Cook. In recent years, though, recruiting had fallen off, and that wasn't ignored by Smith.

The athletic director said his conversation with Matta about making a change had taken place June 2 during a meeting about recruiting.

"We had that touch-base meeting last Friday, and it is kind of hard for me to articulate to you how those meetings go where we sit and talk about, where are we?" Smith said. "It was primarily, obviously about recruiting."

Smith noted that he felt confident about Ohio State's plan for the summer, especially where recruiting was concerned. When it came down to it, some of those plans fell through.

"Recruiting is a major part of it," Smith said. "We weren't winning the battles in recruiting that I thought we might have a chance to win, as (Thad) did. As we started talking about that ... which was three months or so after our (planning) meeting, the flow of the conversation took me to the reality that, 'You know what? Thad, maybe it's time for us to make a leadership change.'"

Ohio State locked in a two-man class this year, with four-star center Kaleb Wesson and three-star guard Braxton Beverly signing with the Buckeyes.

Ohio State had three commits for the 2018 class before four-star forward Darius Bazley opted to decommit, leaving just four-star guard Dane Goodwin and three-star forward Justin Ahrens in the class.

Part of the downward trend for Ohio State in recent years could also be attributed to Matta's health. The coach has had long-term problems with his back, and on June 16, 2007, he underwent a surgery that was supposed to help. The procedure went wrong, though, and left him with what doctors call "drop foot," meaning he would need to wear a brace on his right leg the rest of his life. In total, Matta has undergone four back surgeries, with the first coming when he was 15 years old.



TIM MOODY

**SUCCESSFUL CAREER – Thad Matta leaves Ohio State as the winningest coach in program history.**

With his Ohio State career over, Matta admitted that he would probably still be with the Buckeyes if he were 100 percent healthy.

"There's had to be a lot of adjustments," Matta said. "We had our heyday when I was in this situation. By no stretch am I using that as an excuse. Do I wish it was better? Yes, I do. Gene probably wishes it was better. It is just one of those things. But I would never make that as an excuse. It is what it is, and I have had to deal with it."

Matta's health has been a hindrance on the recruiting trail as well. In 2017, he admitted that an opposing school had told a recruit he was dying – which wasn't true – but negative recruiting for health-related reasons still played a part for Ohio State under Matta.

With his Ohio State career over, Matta wasn't ready to say he was done coaching for good, but another job wasn't his first priority.

"Never say never," Matta said. "Honestly, my whole focus right now is trying to get healthy. That is all I am concerned about. If I were to go back into coaching, it would probably be track. When the parents want to cuss me out after a game, I can say, 'This is the time your son ran. I can't help you on that. There were no shots or touches or anything like that.' I don't know. My whole focus is on getting my body where I can continue to be serviceable."

"I don't think anyone can truly comprehend what this job does to you. I went through a year where I couldn't walk. I couldn't take my shoes off after a game, I couldn't take my pants off after a game."

Although he wasn't sure what the future holds, Matta had a firm idea of what he'd like to be remembered for in Columbus, and it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with wins and losses.

"I hope No. 1 I am remembered as a really good person," he said, "a guy who cared about the university and cared about his players. I think from that perspective, that is probably what is most important to me."

Before the press conference, reports surfaced that Matta would coach one more season before retiring. Smith made it clear that that option was not on the table.

"We did not talk about, I did not say to him, 'Can you stay one more year?'" Smith said. "That was never a part of our conversa-

tion. I felt where he was. I also quantifiably looked at where we were from my responsibility point of view. I just felt like it was time."

## Moving Forward

After announcing that Matta's time at Ohio State had come to an end, Smith said there wasn't an exact timetable for the Buckeyes to make a new hire.

"No time is optimal, but obviously this time is not the best," he said. "I need to be sensitive to what I am dealing with in this window of time. I do not have a timeline, but I am going to do my best to search and find the right person that fits the Ohio State University."

"Besides wins and losses, Thad has set a standard of culture and how we do things the right way. In basketball, you need to take your time and find the right person that you know is always going to do it the right way when you're not looking. I am going to take my time and do it right."

Smith added that Matta agreed to stay on to help with the transition process.

"He will help me as I talk to candidates," Smith said of Matta. "As soon as I call a candidate, they are going to call him next. We have to be aligned with our conversations. He will help me."

For the time being, Smith said all Ohio State assistant coaches and staff members were still employed at the university. Matta, who has three years remaining on his contract, will receive all of the remaining compensation as well.

Smith did say that he doesn't anticipate a current member of Ohio State's staff being the next head coach, "but anything could happen."

Matta stressed that he wants to do what he can to help the program going forward where other coaches might choose to distance themselves from a similar situation.

"I want this basketball program to win a national championship," he said. "I have spent 13 years here, and this place is home to my family and (Smith) knows that. I think that is why we were able to have the type of conversation because of the man that he is."

Because Matta's departure was unexpected, there had been limited speculation as of press time on who Ohio State's next head coach could be. Some potential options included Xavier coach Chris Mack, Arizona head coach Sean Miller, Butler coach Chris Holtmann or even Oklahoma City Thunder coach Billy Donovan.

## Goodwin Says He's Still Committed To Ohio State

Continued From Page 1

One recruit who is a Buckeye pledge is Dane Goodwin, a four-star product out of Upper Arlington, Ohio, from the 2018 cycle. Goodwin (6-4, 175) committed to Ohio State in December of 2014, before even playing his first game of high school basketball.

"I would say that it's kind of hard to tell just because I've been with Ohio State for that long," Goodwin told BSB when asked if he would consider looking at other schools. "I feel obligated and I still do want to go to Ohio State. That's still a very reasonable and doable option for me. I'm still looking forward to that. But like I said, as of now, I'm still committed and that's really all I can say."

Goodwin, Scout's No. 63 overall recruit and 14th-ranked shooting guard in 2018, added that Matta's presence was certainly a critical reason he committed to the Buckeyes so early.

"Being the head coach, one of the main reasons you commit to a school would be because of the coach, and that was definitely a big aspect of my decision," Goodwin explained. "Thad is the type of guy you look forward to being coached by and to be around. To see it go down like that is definitely heartbreaking."

"I think just like everyone else, it kind of took me by surprise too. I was seeing on Twitter that he was going to have one more year, and then 20 minutes later getting a call that he was fired definitely took me by surprise. It kind of hits you hard. Still to this point, it really hasn't sunk in yet."

Goodwin is good friends with fellow 2018 Ohio State commit Justin Ahrens (6-5, 180), a three-star small forward out of Versailles, Ohio. The two talked shortly after the Matta news broke, Goodwin said.

"Right after it happened we texted back and forth making sure we both knew what was going on and then go from there," Goodwin said. "Nothing has changed as of right now."

Upper Arlington head coach Tim Casey told BSB he believes Matta's exit would bring some level of pause to Goodwin in regard to his future.

"I think a lot of where you decide to go to school is your relationship with the coach," Casey explained. "So I'm sure now that that relationship is no longer, I can't imagine that (Dane's) not going to rethink his decision and at least explore other opportunities and things like that."

When asked for his reaction concerning Matta no longer being the head coach at OSU, Casey could say nothing but positive things about the former Buckeye coach.

"My initial thoughts are that's a really good coach who has done a really good job," Casey said of Matta. "Anytime you're in the coaching profession it's a tough profession, but I think Coach Matta has been nothing but nice, open, always willing to work with the high school coaches in the state."

"It saddens me that this happened. I think very highly of Coach. I think he's a great guy, he's a great person. I think he's a good coach and I'm sure whatever is in his future – if he wants to continue to coach – he's going to land on his feet and get a great job and build a great program again like he did at Ohio State."

# Matta's Time At OSU Ended In Unexpected Manner

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Hal Leiner, sometimes ad salesman and longtime friend to BSB, has been asking me for quite some time now, "Why is it that it always ends badly for an Ohio State basketball coach?"

Dating back to the legendary Fred Taylor, it has pretty much been that way. An Ohio State basketball coach starts off with a bang but ends up struggling and finally is shown the door. It was true with Taylor, Eldon Miller, Randy Ayers, Jim O'Brien and now Thad Matta. Gary Williams, who was never comfortable as the second-fiddle coach in Columbus and had one foot out the door from the time he arrived, was the lone exception, leaving on his own for his alma mater Maryland after just two seasons.

In the case of Matta, I didn't think it was going to happen the way it did. I assumed that he was going to, whether under pressure from AD Gene Smith or not, announce his retirement due to health concerns. Instead, it turned out to be a firing, regardless of what "mutual agreement" spin they may have put on it.

I guess I am a little surprised that if Smith was going to fire Matta, they didn't do it immediately after the season. It would have helped in finding a new coach and certainly helped in recruiting.

And directly or indirectly, this is really all about recruiting. Sure it's about wins and losses, but wins and losses are directly related to recruiting and both the team's recruiting and wins and losses have been on a downward spiral. More importantly, there did not appear to be any improvement – in recruiting or success on the court – on the horizon.

In fact, as was implied in the press conference announcing Matta's departure, the reason that the coach's termination may have come after it seemed that he was going to survive for at least one more season was that the recruiting was not showing signs of getting any better.

In fact things were going in the wrong direction with the defection of Cincinnati Princeton small forward Darius Bazley, a 2018 recruit who decommitted from the Buckeyes via Twitter on April 26. Not only did Bazley decommit, but he had some negative comments about the Buckeyes on his way out the door, noting the team's failure to make the NCAA Tournament the last two years, questioning the quality of the other incoming recruits and wondering if Ohio State was still a good avenue to the NBA.

As I have said in this space previously, good coaches don't suddenly become bad coaches. But they can lose their enthusiasm or ability to be effective as coaches. Matta's well-documented health issues are in one way or another related to his ouster.

His struggles had to have limited his ability to really hit the recruiting trail hard. I look to a quote from elsewhere in this paper concerning football recruiting.

"Show me a coach who is a prolific golfer and I'll show you a lousy recruiter because recruiting has got to be their hobby," longtime grid recruiting expert Tom Lemming says. "And really guys like Urban Meyer and Nick Saban and (Clemson coach) Dabo Swinney, their hobby is recruiting and it shows."

I doubt that Matta, given that he can't take his own shoes or pants off, is out playing golf all the time.

But unless you are the basketball coach at the likes of Duke or Kentucky, you've got to be relentless in your recruiting. It's hard to believe that if you have trouble getting dressed, that you can aggressively crisscross the country in a car or plane looking for talent.

The problem was compounded by the fact that rival coaches were using his health

issues against him on the recruiting trail, some going as far as to tell prospects that Matta was going to die.

It was telling that when Matta was asked at his departure press conference if he did not have his health issues, would he still be coach? His answer was, "Yes, probably."

Not that I am making excuses for Matta. There's no need to make excuses.

He took over a dysfunctional program from O'Brien and led the Buckeyes to heights not seen since the Taylor era. He took the Buckeyes to a pair of Final Fours in a six-year span. His Buckeye teams won five regular-season Big Ten titles and another four Big Ten tourney crowns to boot in his 13 years at the helm.

The thing that I will remember most of his tenure was the heated rivalry the Buckeyes had with Michigan State and coach Tom Izzo, among the most highly-respected programs and coaches in the country. It was a rivalry based on good talent, good coaching and a tremendous amount of respect between the coaches and the programs. And Matta very much held his own against Izzo and his Spartans.

In fact, Izzo came to Matta's defense this season when it was clear that the Buckeye coach was on the hot seat. After Matta beat Michigan State for what proved to be the last time on Jan. 15 at the Schottenstein Center, Izzo said of his rival, "I shouldn't say this but hell, I'm happy for him."

"From a standpoint of the way people treat him around here, I'm happy for him. He's won a lot of games here, and him and I have played in a lot of championships here."

"He doesn't have to answer to anybody," Izzo continued. "He doesn't need my support. But I'll probably need his."

As it turned out, Izzo proved the last man standing.

By the way, Matta was quick to point out that when his Buckeyes were riding high, he was dealing with the same health constraints that he is now.

"We had our heyday when I was in this situation," Matta said at the press conference. "By no stretch am I using that as an excuse. Do I wish it was better? Yes, I do. Gene probably wishes it was better. It is just one of those things. But I would never make that as an excuse. It is what it is and I have had to deal with it."

And now he will have to deal with the fact that he is no longer the coach of the Buckeyes. It was a good run. People will continue to debate whether he or Fred Taylor was the best coach in Ohio State history. It's always a lively debate.

But as Hal Leiner says, regardless of how great a career they have in Columbus, it always seems to end up badly for the Ohio State basketball coach.

### Taylor And Knight

Totally coincidental to the Matta dismissal, I recently came across a note in BSB chronicling the renaming of part of Fyffe Road near the then-newly constructed Schottenstein Center to Fred Taylor Drive in November of 1998.

Former Buckeye player Bob Knight, who went on to become a legendary coach in his own right at Indiana, was one of the speakers as his Ohio State coach was honored. The street-naming program was fairly straightforward

until it was Knight's turn to speak. Taylor had received plaudits from former players and OSU administrators, including then-athletic director Andy Geiger.

"As far as Andy making the comment that Coach Taylor's players always conduct themselves as gentlemen, I kind of take exception to that," the cantankerous Knight said. "He didn't turn out a real gentleman in me."

"I'm not real big on this building," he added of Ohio State's new basketball venue, "because I had two things that I think nobody else has in St. John Arena. I coached there actually longer than anybody has been over there, which is 28 years. And there's probably been no single person that's ever been booed more in St. John Arena. I'd hate to see you have 6,000 more people to get on my ass."

Knight also gave an indication as to where he might have gotten his penchant for foul language.

"Coach," he said toward Taylor, "there were a lot of guys that played for you that played better for you than I did. But nobody paid more attention to you than I did. That's usually evident in the language that I use."

Knight had more serious praise for his mentor, however.

"For 36 years I've walked in and out of gyms and on and off floors all over the world, and at no time have I ever walked off the basketball floor without thinking of something that he taught me, something we've talked about, a question that I've asked him or an answer that he gave me. Hopefully what Fred Taylor taught and what he stands for will be evident on basketball floors across the country."

I know who Bob Knight would vote for in the debate over the greatest basketball coach in Ohio State history.

### Beating The Odds

I was in Las Vegas for the College Sports Publishers Association convention recently. Interestingly, the topic of postal delivery, the leading point of discussion at the gatherings for more than two decades, barely came up this year. Not that timely delivery of the publications is not a concern. It is a more prevalent problem than ever.

It just seems the talk centers more on the Internet these days. Much of the talk this time was about online sports networks, as there has been consolidation in that regard recently with the purchase of the Scout Network, parent of our own BuckeyeSports.com, by CBS, owner of the 247 Network. The ramifications of the consolidation have yet to be determined. We will certainly keep you posted as developments arise.

When I am out in Vegas I always like to pick up the sheets featuring the odds for college football or basketball teams to win their respective national championships. The guys out in Vegas are pretty sharp about these things. Their livelihood depends on it.

So if you are looking for some encouragement as far as the Ohio State basketball team and its prospects for the upcoming season, don't look to the guys in Sin City.

The sheet at the Golden Nugget lists the odds for the Buckeyes to win the national championship at 300/1, behind such schools as Xavier and Northwestern (80/1), Cincinnati,

Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada and San Diego State (100/1). Schools with the same odds as the Buckeyes include Dayton, Illinois State, Nebraska and Penn State.

These numbers, of course, were posted before Matta's ouster. I would be curious to see if the 300/1 mark changes, up or down. It probably will depend on who is named coach, but I can't see them getting much better.

Interestingly, OSU rival Michigan State has the best odds on this sheet at 7/1. Bluebloods Kentucky and Duke are at 10/1 and Louisville and Kansas at 12/1.

Fortunately, the guys in Vegas like the Ohio State football team's chances a lot better than those of the basketball Buckeyes. Treasure Island gives the grid Buckeyes 4/1 odds, bettered only by Alabama at 3/1. Buckeye opponent Oklahoma comes in at 9/2, while rival Michigan, Florida State, and USC all check in at 6/1. Defending champion Clemson, which put such a licking on the Buckeyes last season, is only at 15/1.

### Summer Schedule

Just a reminder about our print and electronic schedule for the summer months. The next print issue of BSB will be mailed July 3. That is followed by what is traditionally our longest gap between print issues of the year. After the July issue, we will not publish a print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin until our big Football Preview issue, to be mailed on a yet-to-be-determined date in late August. We should have a firm publication date for you in the July issue.

However, we will be putting plenty of Buckeye news out there between these print issues. Electronic issues of BSB Quickly will be posted on June 20, July 18, and Aug. 1 and 8, loaded with football recruiting information and much, much more. These electronic issues, free to all BSB print subscribers, will have all the current OSU sports news, plus columns and features. They will include any news from the annual Big Ten Media Days set for July 24-25 in Chicago, as well as all the news as the Buckeyes return to the field for fall camp.

If you are not already enjoying BSB's 36 additional electronic issues, be sure to see the simple instructions of page 5 of this issue. Or feel free to give us a call at (614) 486-2202 and we will be glad to walk you through the process.

### The Perfect Kickoff

In our Fan Forum on page 2, readers check in with their thoughts on what is the best time for an Ohio State football game to start. I was pleased to see that many of you agree with me that there are too many night games. While the days of all home games starting at 1:30 are long gone, I do miss the days when there was just one night game a year and it was a really big deal, usually played against a top-notch opponent. When half your games are played under the lights, it takes away from the excitement of the event.

I know Meyer loves these games because of the recruiting value, but I worry about those who live outside the central Ohio area driving home so late, especially after what can be a full day of tailgating when the kick doesn't come until the evening. I must also selfishly add that it is much harder to produce Buckeye Sports Bulletin in a timely fashion after a night game, especially if it is on the road.

Of the choices out there right now, I probably prefer the noon start – and that's noon on Saturday!! Thursday games are for conferences and teams that need the exposure.

At least the Michigan game is still going to be played at noon on Saturday this year.



# Holtmann Considering All Roster Options

By RYAN MCGLADE  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State welcomed its 14th men's basketball head coach in program history when Chris Holtmann was officially hired June 9. Holtmann, who replaced Thad Matta after his 13-year tenure came to an end on June 5, was the head coach at Butler the last three seasons. His head-coaching career began at Gardner-Webb, where he was at the helm from 2010-13.

It has been a whirlwind for Holtmann since getting hired in June. He has had to juggle getting settled into his new position, developing relationships with the players currently on the team and recruiting, along with countless other tasks.

Despite the busy schedule, Holtmann found some time to discuss the aforementioned items as well as other topics such as the addition of 2017 Massillon (Ohio) Jackson forward Kyle Young, who was at one time a Butler signee, and the outlook for the program going forward.

## How are you getting settled in Columbus?

Holtmann: "It's coming. Yes, it's coming. I felt really welcomed here by (Athletics Director) Gene (Smith) and by all of the people here. It's been great. I've had some good time meeting people and meeting a lot of the staff at the Schottenstein Center and some athletic department staff.

"You hit the ground running whenever you get a new job. You really hit the ground running when you get that job in June and when you're looking at potentially adding to your current roster in June and then also catching up with '18 and '19 classes."

## What can you do with the current roster at this point in the year?

Holtmann: "I think be really selective. I think priority No. 1 is we want to be deliberate and prudent in our decision-makings when it comes to who we could potentially add. I think that we're thinner than probably anybody would like to be right now in terms of numbers. I think we all recognize that. I think we've got some outstanding kids and some really good players returning, but numbers are thin.

"How do you address that in June when everything has kind of been picked over? You may add more walk-ons than you typically would. I think that is something that we will probably do. Obviously, the addition of Kyle makes a lot of sense for us for a variety of reasons but also really helps.

"Then if there is another guard that we could add that would make sense, we're certainly considering that. Right now, you make a lot of calls and it's not the right fit – we don't feel like it's maybe the right fit – or guys have made their decision."

## Have you thought about the junior college route?

Holtmann: "We've thought about it. We have thought about it. We've discussed everything from graduate transfers to junior college options at guard to transfers in general. But we certainly don't want to compromise on them being what we feel like are Ohio State guys, and we don't to compromise on their talent or ability because that just handicaps you in the future.

"So because of that, I don't know that we'll add another one, but we'd like to. And if we feel like he can come in and play an important role and grow and help us not just

now but in the future, then we'll probably do that."

## How hard is it to balance the current team with the 2018 and 2019 classes?

Holtmann: "It's hard. It's tempting probably to reach at this point. But I've been counseled by enough guys who have done this and reached and regretted it. I took over a different situation, but my first head-coaching job was massive in its scale of rebuild and all of that kind of stuff, so I learned something there. But I've talked to enough people who have reached and ended up regretting reaching.

"Whether it be because academically they weren't the right fit or they couldn't help them down the road compete at the level they wanted to compete at so that scholarship is tied up or the character piece. Unfortunately, in June, there are more of those issues that you have than you do at other times.

"I just think we're going to be really convicted in our belief that we just can't do that. If that means a third of our team, so to speak, is walk-ons, that might be the case. That might be the case."

## Have you had much experience with the JUCO and graduate transfer routes in your time as a head coach?

Holtmann: "Yes, both. But at Butler, graduate transfers were really important for us. We got to the Sweet 16 because we recruited well last year, but part of that recruiting well was high school kids, a transfer who sat one (year) and played one (year) and then a graduate transfer from Memphis, Avery Woodson, who played a really important role for us. He was nearly a double-figure scorer. We went down that road, but basically all of those guys or most of those guys have made decisions at this point – graduate transfers."

## Have you started to think about how to manage a roster where you have one experienced point guard (junior C.J. Jackson) and one other freshman point guard (Braxton Beverly)?

Holtmann: "I've tossed that around and have been discussing some ideas on what that would look like and what we could do and who we could potentially move there. I have looked at that. I think I realize, I think our guys realize that that's going to be the focal point of our team, that position. Just because we have, more than anything, some inexperience there.

"But I think I'm excited about the guys we have in that position, I really am, going through some workouts here. Obviously, C.J. and Braxton, I'm excited about those guys.

"Most guys would tell you they'd love to be able to have three point guards on their roster at all times – that was kind of Thad's deal as well. He wanted to have three point guards. I could anticipate that we will play J.T. (senior forward Jae'Sean Tate) there some for sure. To what capacity? I don't know. But he's going to play all over, right? He's going to play probably four positions at a time, but that will certainly be one of them I would think."

(Editor's note: Beverly was granted his release from the program on June 30.)

## Have you spoken to JaQuan Lyle and is there any chance he could end up back with the program?

Holtmann: "I have not spoken with him.

I have not had that conversation. Gene and I have discussed our roster multiple times and different options, but at this point I don't anticipate that."

## What is Derek Funderburk's status in regard to his suspension that was issued June 15, and what does he have to do to earn his way back if he's not there yet?

Holtmann: "As of today (June 23), it continues. I think the biggest thing that I want for him is, coming in as a coaching staff, I really want him to be successful. I really, really want him to be successful.

"He's talented but he has some work to do in some areas outside of basketball. He has some work to do. I'll let you guys kind of figure that out. Obviously, one of them is in the classroom. He has some definite work to do, and when we see progress in that area – significant progress – then we'll reevaluate things. But we need to see definite progress, and that's kind of our responsibility as well to his family.

"I spoke with his dad (Derek) last week and his dad was like, 'Coach, he's got to grow in some of these areas,' and that's what we're hoping to see here. I think he's really talented and those that know him know he's got a great way about him – he's got an outgoing personality. So I'm optimistic, but at this point we'll see."

(Editor's note: Funderburk was dismissed from the team on June 30.)

## Whether the team names them or you do, will you have captains?

Holtmann: "We will. It's like at Butler, the guys that went out before games and shook the referees' hands, they kind of decided that on their own. That's great, that's kind of a ceremonial thing but it doesn't really impact winning at all. But I think we will probably name, 'Hey, these are the captains,' for sure."

## Based on what you've said and what the previous staff said, it seems like Keita Bates-Diop and Jae'Sean are lining up for significant roles. Are those guys that you're leaning on a little bit?

Holtmann: "Yes, for sure. Those two guys have been outstanding, and they're going to be really important for us. Those two guys have been terrific."

## What have you seen so far from Keita now that he's back from season-ending surgery on his leg?

Holtmann: "He's getting in shape, he's getting in better shape. This has been our first full week of skill workouts. Now, I've had a chance to go back and watch some game footage but it was more from last year and he wasn't playing much because he was injured. But I'm excited about him, excited about his approach right now.

"He's fresh and has just gotten back into workouts so his conditioning is impacted, but he's extremely coachable right now. I can see why people would look at him and say, 'Wow, he's really intriguing in terms of what he can eventually be.' Because you look at his frame (6-7, 235), his length and his versatility, and you say, 'Wow, that's a young man that, as he continues to grow, can really have an impact.'

"He's been great so far, and he's 100 percent cleared and healthy. He had a really, really good workout yesterday so you're

asking me on a good day. I thought he had a really good workout and he's getting in a little bit better shape.

"I spent some time with his mom (Wilma) when she came over last week. It was great to see her. I'm really excited about Keita."

## You mentioned Kyle Young earlier. Can you take us through the process of him deciding to come to Ohio State?

Holtmann: "It really came down to Butler and Ohio State for Kyle. There were a ton of other schools, pretty much every other – you guys know the number of schools that really wanted him. I would sit down at events and he was the focal point for a lot of people this year. It really ended up coming down to these two places.

"Kyle's story is unique because he's had some personal tragedy, so I think the relationship that was formed over a couple years of recruiting him by (assistant coach) Ryan Pedon and myself at the end of the day was probably the deciding factor – even though I know this place had real pull for him initially.

"I did not speak with him after my initial phone call to him as I called all the players and told them I was leaving (Butler). I had no contact with him or his family – none whatsoever. I just told him that he needed to see this thing through with Butler, and then at that point if he decided that Butler was not the place for him then we can kind of go from there.

"I think it was unique because he's an hour and a half away, it was unique because of his personal story. Those things make this situation, but he really needed to drive the bus completely on that decision – he and his family completely on that decision. Then when we got the release, I called him that afternoon (June 19). You could tell, he was set in his mind probably pretty early on."

## Given your head-coaching experience and what happened to the guy who had the job before you, what gives you the confidence you're going to have this eight-year contract and maybe another contract? What gives you the confidence that this is going to work?

Holtmann: "Overall, I believe in the way we do things. I believe in our philosophy and how we go about things – I have a strong belief in that. But listen, when you're at this level, you've got to prove it every day. We're not going to shy away from that. We have to prove this every single day, and that's what it's going to be about.

"As I spoke in my press conference (on June 12), it's going to be about doing today well. If you do enough of today's well, then tomorrows will take care of itself. I really believe that. I think anyone who says that there won't be times of self-doubt, they're lying to you. Believe in the process and the plan we have in place, but eventually we're all going to have to prove that our plan is successful.

"I will tell you this, of all the opportunities that came my way, there was not one that appealed to me nearly to the degree that this one did. I never seriously considered one. My wife (Lori) knew when I got the call on Tuesday (June 6) that this one had some weight and gravity to it because I think The Ohio State University is really special. I think it's a really special place. If I was going to leave a special place, it needed to be to a really special place.

"I think for all of those reasons, we're going to have some challenges in front of us – I get that. We'll have some ups and downs and some rocky days, but I believe ultimate-

CHRIS  
HOLTMANN

## THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: CHRIS HOLTMANN



TIM MOODY

**HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING** – After being hired in early June, Chris Holtmann had a busy first few weeks as Ohio State's head basketball coach.

ly that if we stay committed to what we're doing, good things will happen."

**How much of a challenge will it be to prove the principles that you guys have that allowed you to be so successful at Butler in recruiting? How important is it to show that those can also be successful recruiting at this level?**

Holtmann: "I see a lot of similarities. The waters that we were recruiting in those last couple years were pretty deep. The guys that we were getting could pretty much play anywhere in the country – a lot of places. I think most importantly we just don't want to get away from the kind of kid that we've recruited. And the kind of kids I observed here from a distance that I was like, 'Whoa, those are impressive people, they're impressive players, they're impressive in their approach.'"

"And it's not just the pros – we could rattle off all of the names – but you look at during Thad's tenure, which is the tenure that I probably followed the closest, there were obviously great players before, great coaches before, but that's the one I follow the most. And you say, 'Those are very similar to the kind of guys that I coached and recruited in the past. Hopefully we can continue to do that.'"

"The challenge is in front of us in '18 and '19, and there's no question about it. That's exciting and we're digging in. When you get the job in June it puts you a little bit behind. You have to reidentify the new relationship with recruits – particularly in the '18 class. That's the work ahead of us right now."

**You have enough space to bring in five players for the 2018 class. You have said you may bring in three or four in '18. Why wouldn't you use all five?**

Holtmann: "Good question. Very rarely will we have 13 players on scholarship. Say that 13 guys are eligible to play on scholarship ... it's too hard to keep that number happy (in terms of playing time). You can't do it. So it leads to turnover. You're going to have turnover anyway because it's the nature of the beast right now. So that might be why. There could be some unique circumstances that could lead to us using all of them."

"But I think once we feel really good about where we're at in recruiting and where our roster is numbers wise and once we feel like it's really healthy, we may not have more

than 10 or 11 players. You might have 10 that are eligible to play and then one who's a transfer that's sitting out. Having said that, early on we could end up using all of them and maybe potentially redshirting one. We have more flexibility here early because we need to have more flexibility."

**Is adding another big-man a priority with just Kaleb Wesson and Micah Potter on the roster?**

Holtmann: "I like our guys there at that position. I think that's good depth. You'd like to maybe have a third that could play both the power forward and the five spot that has some versatility. But I think Micah has some versatility there, too, so we will add definitely another."

"I don't know that it will be strictly a five in this class. Obviously, people look at our team and they say, 'Hey, the focal point is guards and wings.' And I get that, that is our focal point. Beyond that we'll add somebody on the frontline."

**Did you have any ties to Ohio State going in?**

Holtmann: "I was born in the state. I'm trying to think here. What could I tell you? Like a personal story that somebody from Columbus saved my life or something. More than anything, I've recruited this state for 20 years, so I've been through it a lot and I have an appreciation for, obviously, this university. I have an appreciation for this athletic department and what it's been able to do. I have great respect for, obviously, what (OSU football head coach) Urban (Meyer) has done."

"I think all of that combined with my just feel for the Midwest, my appreciation for the Midwest, for being in this state, for being at Ohio University and then following Thad's tenure here. I certainly didn't anticipate that I'd be sitting in this chair in June, but I've always thought it's a terrific place."

**You brought your three assistants over from Butler with you. Will you be making any more changes to the support staff?**

Holtmann: "We will be adding to the support staff. I think you guys know (director of basketball operations) David Egelhoff has been retained."

**In the same position?**

Holtmann: "Same position, yes. Thad called me and said, 'Whatever you do, keep David Egelhoff.' I said, 'OK, Thad. I'm going to listen to you and I'm going to do that.' He repeated it so I was like, 'No, Thad, I'm really going to do this. You made my decision for me.' I knew David a little bit. We knew his family a little bit."

"Then we'll figure out some things from there. There will be probably one or two additions to kind of the support staff. Obviously, we had a player development role (at Butler) and there might be another role that I add. Whether it's a special assistant to the head coach, it's going to be kind of a position to be named."

**Did you guys have a strength coach at Butler?**

Holtmann: "Yes, we did. Jim Peal did a great job. I will be bringing in a strength coach here. I've got great appreciation for Dave Richardson, Coach Richardson and what he's done – I've heard great things – but we'll be bringing in a strength coach here."

**Gene Smith said the No. 1 item on**

his list for when he was looking for a new coach was recruiting. When you look at your personal skill set, where would you rank recruiting?

Holtmann: "I feel like it's a collective effort. You have to have a staff that is really competent and good in that area. It's something that I enjoy, quite honestly. It's something I enjoy. I enjoy the challenge of it, the relationship building. I enjoy both the evaluation process of who you're adding to your program and how important that is. So I'll let others kind of evaluate how we do."

"Everywhere I've been relative to our league and our level, we've had good success in that area. Any coaching success or honors I've had have been because we've first been able to recruit effectively, and we all know how important that is."

**You played in Puerto Rico and in the Bahamas when you were at Butler. Do you think that's something you'd like to get Ohio State involved in?**

Holtmann: "Yes, it is. I would like to. The schedule was basically finished – a couple contracts coming in – before we arrived. So it's in place and I think it will be released maybe in the next month or so. I didn't have any flexibility over this year's schedule. But moving forward, I would like to do that. I think those tournaments are fun."

"Portland (vs. Gonzaga in the 2017 Phil Knight Invitational) will be a terrific challenge this year. That will be a lot of fun for our fan base. Buckeye Nation, I think, is going to enjoy that. Those are fun tournaments to be a part of, whether it's Maui or the Battle 4 Atlantis (in the Bahamas) or any of them."

"I think, and you'll see this and you can hold me to it, but I think if I'm going to err, it's going to be err on the side of it being more challenging than not challenging in the non-conference. I thought to myself last year that I might have made a mistake by doing it, but it ended up allowing us to have a four-seed in the NCAA Tournament, and it was all a byproduct really of the nonconference schedule."

"Hopefully, we can get to that point. I think that's important. Hopefully, we can have some games that will attract our fan base."

"One of the things I'm so excited about is the energy that has been in the Schottenstein Center during some of the games that I watch and during Thad's tenure was just incredible. I'm excited about getting to that."

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## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

# Holtmann Ready To Take On Challenge At OSU

By RYAN McGLADE  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Shortly after Thad Matta was relieved of his duties as the head coach of the Ohio State men's basketball team on June 5, rumors began to swirl as to who would be Matta's replacement. A name that was mentioned early and often was Chris Holtmann.

Holtmann spent the previous three seasons coaching at Butler, posting a 70-31 (.693) record. The 2017 Big East Coach of the Year guided the Bulldogs to the NCAA Tournament all three years as well, falling to eventual national champion North Carolina in the Sweet 16 this past spring.

Holtmann was an assistant for Brandon Miller at Butler for the 2013-14 season before being named the interim head coach in October of 2014 after Miller took a medical leave of absence. The "interim" tag was removed in January of 2015.

Prior to his time at Butler, Holtmann was the man in charge at Gardner-Webb for three seasons (2010-13), his first head-coaching job. The Nicholasville, Ky., native took over a seven-win team and led it to a school Division I-record 21 victories and a berth in the CollegeInsider.com postseason tournament in his final year, which led to him being named the 2013 Big South Conference Coach of the Year. The Runnin' Bulldogs went 44-54 (.449) with Holtmann at the helm.

Holtmann had assistant-coaching stints at his alma mater of Taylor University (1997-98, 1999-2003), Geneva College (1998-99), Gardner-Webb (2003-08), Ohio University (2008-10) and Butler (2013-14). When at Ohio, he was on the coaching staff of John Groce, a former Buckeye assistant coach under Matta.

On June 9, Holtmann officially became the 14th head coach in Ohio State program history.

"The Ohio State University men's basketball program is one of the most respected in the country, and our coach must respect that great tradition," OSU athletic director Gene Smith said of Holtmann at his introductory press conference on June 12. "We sought a



JAMES GREGA

**ON BOARD – Chris Holtmann was introduced as Ohio State's head basketball coach June 12 after being hired June 9.**

high-intensity individual with an emphasis on academics, someone who is relentless in recruiting with great ties to the great state of Ohio and the contiguous states. We found a proven winner who is a community-engager and bottom line fits our culture."

Considering Holtmann's first two head coaching stops were at Gardner-Webb and Butler, Ohio State is certainly a step up in terms of national recognition. Holtmann, however, appears to be ready for the brighter spotlight as the leader of the Buckeyes, who are currently experiencing a two-year hiatus from the Big Dance.

"I think one of the reasons you come to a place like this is because you understand that expectations come with it, and we're certainly not going to shy away from that," Holtmann said. "We understand we have some work ahead of us. I think our guys are excited about that, I'm really excited about that, but this is a proud program that is used to competing for championships. It's used to competing in the NCAA Tournament. And

we're going to work diligently to make that happen."

As far as what Ohio State fans should expect from a Holtmann-led squad, allow the coach to explain.

"Aggressive, attacking, we want to be physical and tough and tough-minded," Holtmann said. "It's obviously something we're going to have to work on every day, but tough and tough-minded is going to be important. But we want to play an aggressive, attacking style, and we want our guys to play with freedom. We want them to go out there and cut loose and play. I think that's what people will see when they watch our team."

## Holtmann Garners Lucrative Contract

Holtmann's employment contract was obtained by BSB on June 14 through a public records request, and the new head coach landed a healthy deal.

According to the contract, Holtmann will make \$3 million a year over the next eight years. The \$3 million he is set to earn each year consists of the base salary (\$850,000); media, promotions and public relations (\$1,315,000); apparel (\$825,000); and an appearance for Coca-Cola (\$10,000).

The contract also states that Ohio State is responsible for reimbursing Holtmann for any expenses he sustains for terminating his contract with Butler. In April, Holtmann signed an extension with Butler through the 2024-25 season.

Holtmann has a few ways to receive annual bonuses as well. Anytime the team's cumulative grade-point average for an academic year is 3.0 or better, he gets a \$50,000 bonus. If the GPA is 3.5 or better, he earns a \$150,000 bonus.

As for his team's performance on the hardwood, he receives an additional \$20,000 for being crowned Big Ten regular-season champion or co-champion, \$40,000 for winning the Big Ten tournament, \$40,000 for playing in the NCAA Tournament, \$20,000 for participating in the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament, \$20,000 for competing in the Final Four of the NCAA Tournament and \$100,000 for winning the national title.

If any of the aforementioned on-court items are vacated, Holtmann must repay Ohio State the corresponding bonus.

Should Holtmann terminate his contract at any point within the first four years, he will have to pay Ohio State the amount remaining on his contract multiplied by how many years are left on the deal. For example, if he departed after two years he would owe the \$18 million left on his contract multiplied by the six years remaining for a total of \$108 million.

If Holtmann terminates his employment with Ohio State after the first four years, he must pay the university an equal amount to the total cost of his three assistant coaches' salaries for the remaining term of his contract.

Conversely, if Ohio State fires Holtmann without any cause, the university must pay him however much money is left on his contract.

Holtmann gets a stipend of \$1,200 per month to cover costs for two vehicles. The head coach will also be able to enjoy the links, as OSU will provide him a full golf membership at a mutually-agreed upon golf club.

Further, Holtmann gets a private jet for when he makes recruiting trips that are farther than 200 miles from Columbus. The maximum annual amount that can be spent for his private plane expenses is \$65,000. He has 20 hours a year for personal use of the private jet as well.

For athletic events, Holtmann will receive 12 tickets and two parking passes for each Ohio State home football game and 30 tickets for each Buckeye men's basketball game.

As of press time, the contract had not been finalized.

"The parties recognize that Ohio State shall present (Holtmann) with a more thorough and formal employment contract addressing additional terms of employment in the near future," a statement from the contract reads.

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## OHIO STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

gram, he has familiarity with his coaching staff because he brought all three assistants with him from Butler to Ohio State.

"I am excited about the addition of Ryan (Pedon), Mike (Schrage) and Terry (Johnson) to our coaching staff," Holtmann said in a statement on June 15. "They are outstanding people and coaches. They complement each other extremely well. I know they are committed to working hard to help Ohio State basketball compete at the highest level. They are excited to get to work."

Johnson was an assistant at Butler the last 10 seasons and served as the team's director of basketball operations from 2004 through the 2005-06 season. He admitted spending that much time in Indianapolis made the choice of moving to Columbus an arduous one.

"Obviously, it was a difficult decision," Johnson said June 15. "Coach Holtmann, we talked about it throughout the interviewing process at Butler. We were just kind of waiting to see what happened. Then when we found out what happened, I talked to him that night and made the decision to come to Columbus and was excited about it."

As an assistant for the Bulldogs, Johnson was the defensive coordinator. He will have that same role at Ohio State.

Outside of his time at Butler, Johnson was an assistant at IPFW (1997-99, 2006-07), Indiana Tech (1999-2001) and Lincoln Trail Junior College (2001-03). He held an administrative position at Auburn for the 2003-04 campaign as well.

Pedon spent the last two years as an assistant on the Butler staff. He is best known for his recruiting prowess and was involved with the Bulldogs' offense during his tenure in Indy. Pedon will continue to focus primarily on offense and recruiting now as a Buckeye assistant, with an emphasis on securing Ohio prospects.

"If you look at the history of this program, no matter where you coach, I think you have to say, 'When this program was at its best – different time periods through the past 30, 40, 50 years – why was it?' The common denominator here is kids from this state wanted to be Buckeyes and came here with a purpose. That's how we want to build the program for sure. Recruiting Ohio kids and keeping them home, that's where it's at for our program."

Pedon was a graduate assistant at Miami (Ohio) from 2000-02. He then served as the director of basketball operations at Kent State from 2002-05. He returned to Miami as

an assistant from 2005-10 before joining the Toledo staff in the same role from 2010-13. He was also an assistant at Illinois from 2013-15 under Groce.



Ryan Pedon

Interestingly, Pedon is from Columbus, which makes him even more ecstatic about his new job.

"I've got upward of 400 texts that I still have to return from just the last 2½ days," Pedon said June 15. "But it's, in a lot of ways, a dream come true to be a part of this program, be a part of this university and work for Chris in my hometown. I think if you would have written this scenario up – I started my coaching career

19 years ago – that would make anybody happy. I'm excited to be here. I'm humbled by the opportunity. I'm just excited to get this thing rolling."

Schrage was on Holtmann's Butler staff only for the 2016-17 campaign. Before going to Indianapolis, he was an assistant at Stanford from 2008-16. From 2002-08, he was the director of basketball operations at Duke, and the three years before that he served as the team's academic and recruiting coordinator under head coach Mike Krzyzewski.

Prior to that, Schrage spent the 1998-99 season as an administrative assistant at Mississippi after completing a four-year stint as a student manager under Bob Knight at Indiana, Schrage's alma mater.

"Two of the best, if not the best," Schrage said of Knight and Krzyzewski. "I've been very fortunate. They have a lot of similarities in terms of their competitive drive. Coach Knight, Coach K may have different ways of doing it at times, but I've learned a lot of basketball from Coach Knight. For that to be my foundation, who I thought was the encyclopedia of X's and O's and basketball, I took in so much."

"Then nine years with Coach K, you learn so much about basketball, but communicating with players, team building, he is so good along those lines. Coach Holtmann, he reminds me a lot of Coach K. His ability to communicate at a high level, connect with everybody in the room one through 12 – or how many players you've got – get them to buy into the team vision reminds me a lot of Coach K that way."

While Johnson handles the defense and Pedon is responsible for the offense, Schrage directs his attention toward the personnel.

"It's mainly scouting," Schrage said of

his role on the staff. "I don't want to assume, but I imagine Coach Holtmann is going to do the same thing (as when they were at Butler). So when we scout a team, Coach Pedon will focus on the other team's defense to prepare our offense. Coach Johnson will prepare, obviously, the other team's offense for our defense. Then I'll just focus on personnel."

"Coach Holtmann likes the idea of someone just focusing on personnel completely. So I focus on personnel and you just learn in and out (the opposition's) tendencies, their favorites and it gives me a chance to really zero in, and I think it really makes a difference."

Dave Dickerson, Chris Jent and Greg Paulus were the assistants on the Ohio State coaching staff last season. Dickerson had been with OSU since 2010. Jent was an assistant for the Buckeyes on two separate occasions (2011-13, 2016-17). Paulus joined the staff as video coordinator in June of 2011. He was promoted to assistant coach in the summer of 2013.



Mike Schrage

term starting June 14 and ending Aug. 31, 2018, while Pedon will earn \$395,000 and Schrage \$325,000 during that same time frame.

The three will receive compensation increases as approved by the Board of Trustees for their respective contract terms beginning Sept. 1, 2018.

As for annual bonuses, each assistant will garner 8.5 percent of his then-current salary if the team either wins the Big Ten regular-season championship outright or shares the title. There is no bonus for winning the conference tournament.

All three coaches will each attain another bonus of 8.5 percent of their then-current salaries, respectively, if the squad makes it to the Final Four of the NCAA Tournament. Should the club win the national title, a bonus of 15 percent of their then-current salaries, respectively, will be issued to them.

If any of the aforementioned on-court achievements are vacated, all three must repay Ohio State their corresponding bonuses.

Each of them gets \$600 a month to cover costs for one vehicle. For sporting events, they'll each receive four Ohio State football season tickets and eight Buckeye men's basketball season tickets.

All three contracts had yet to be finalized as of press time.

"The parties recognize that Ohio State shall present (the assistants) with a more thorough and formal employment contract addressing additional terms of employment in the near future," a statement from each of the three contracts reads.

### All 3 Assistants Sign 2-Year Contracts

A day after Johnson, Pedon and Schrage were officially hired, BSB obtained the employment contract of each assistant through a public records request.

All three coaches agreed to two-year deals. Johnson will make \$300,000 for the

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# With Timing In Mind, Holtmann Hire A Good Move

As promised, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith moved quickly to replace ousted basketball coach Thad Matta. On June 9 Smith announced the hiring of Chris Holtmann, who had spent the past three seasons as the coach at Butler.

Ohio State fans sometimes think that the basketball job in Columbus is a little better than it may actually be. They figure that surely Coach K or Rick Pitino or John Calipari would jump at the chance to play second fiddle to Urban Meyer at Ohio State. OK, I am exaggerating about the expectations of Buckeye fans, but not necessarily by much. I am sure that there were plenty of basketball backers who were disappointed by the hiring of Holtmann.

It isn't hard to remember the disappointment of Buckeye fans when Ohio State hired Jim O'Brien back in April of 1997. They had their eyes, in particular, on Clemson's Rick Barnes, a former Buckeye assistant, and Tubby Smith of Georgia, both of whom turned the job down. Other names bandied about included Cincinnati's Bob Huggins and Providence's Pete Gillen.

By the time of O'Brien's hiring, the search was down to the former Boston College coach and Kevin Stallings of Illinois State, two relative unknowns. Buckeye fans were definitely disappointed when then AD Andy Geiger announced O'Brien as the new coach. In his second season, O'Brien had the Buckeyes in the Final Four.

Like most observers of the Buckeye basketball program, I understood the parting of ways with Matta, even though, like most observers, I questioned the timing. If you were going to make a change, why not do it at the end of the season, when more coaches who might be on the move would be available?

It isn't hard to remember that, for different reasons, Ohio State found itself in a similar situation back in the summer of 2004. Geiger fired O'Brien on June 8, after the revelation of assorted NCAA rules violations. Geiger was much slower than his successor, Smith, in the search process, with the hunt for a new coach dragging into July. Those linked with the job included a luster-lacking crew of Rice head coach Willis Wilson, Penn head coach Fran Dunphy, Stallings, now the head coach at Vanderbilt, and former Los Angeles Lakers and Ohio State assistant coach Jim Clemons, a former Buckeye player.

One of the up-and-comers in the coaching ranks, Xavier's Matta, reportedly turned down the opportunity to even interview.

"I'm not a candidate," he told The (Cincinnati) Enquirer. "It's that plain and simple."

Geiger was ultimately able to get Matta to reconsider, hiring him on July 9, and the rest is history chronicled in the Ohio State coaching record books. But, with the names of the others, you get an idea of who might be looking for a job in the late spring and early summer. It was a major coup to land Matta at that time of the year.

When Smith was able to lure Holtmann away from the Bulldog program, it seemed like that was as good a coach as Ohio State was going to get, given the late stage in the hiring game. Having a couple of weeks to think about it, I believe his hiring was a good one at any time of the year.

Again, the big-name coaches aren't budgeting. In Holtmann, you are getting a coach who excelled with a program that you could make the case has recently been as strong as Ohio State's.

Just look at the success of the Bulldogs during the Matta Ohio State years of 2004-2017. As many of you know, it is much to my annoyance that college basketball success is pretty much determined by how a team plays in March Madness. In the 13 seasons that

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Matta was in Columbus, his team made it to the NCAA Tournament nine times (though the Buckeyes were ineligible his first season). Butler also made the Big Dance nine times in that period. Matta led his club to two Final Fours and one national championship game. Butler was also in two Final Fours, making it to the final both times. Both clubs posted an 18-9 record in the tourney in that time frame with the Bulldogs defeating the likes of Maryland, Syracuse, Kansas State, Michigan State, Pitt, Wisconsin, Florida and Texas in tourney action along the way.

So it's not like Holtmann, who led all three of his Butler teams to the Dance and posted a 43 record there, is coming to Columbus from Podunk U.

At this level of basketball, it's as much about recruiting as X's and O's. Holtmann was an outstanding recruiter at Butler and no stranger to trolling for top-notch athletes.

"The waters we were recruiting in those last couple of years were pretty deep," he says of his time at Butler in the interview on pages 10-11 of this issue. "The guys that we were getting could pretty much play anywhere in the country – a lot of places."

You have to assume that Ohio State – with its facilities, academics, support staff, national visibility, fan base, etc. – is an easier product to sell, so things could be very bright for the new coach, just as they were for Matta, also a former Bulldog coach, when he arrived.

I think it was a really good – if not flashy – hire. Time will tell.

### Hiring OSU Coaches

If you are interested in the details of the other recent OSU basketball hirings, you should check out the June 20 issue of the electronic BSB Quickly. We ran reprints of stories about the hiring of all basketball coaches in the BSB era, which include Gary Williams (1986) and Randy Ayers (1989), in addition to O'Brien and Matta.

If you are not already enjoying BSB Quickly, free to all active Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers, now would be a great time to take advantage of this subscription benefit. This is the last print issue of BSB until our big Football Preview Issue, set to be mailed the week of Aug. 21. However, there will be electronic BSB Quicklys posted on July 18, Aug. 1, 8 and 30.

There is no reason to miss any of the Ohio State recruiting news, developments from Big Ten Media Days or from the opening of fall football camp. Check out the simple sign-up instructions on page 5 of this issue.

### The Interview Issue

As I am sure you have figured out by now, this is our annual "Interview Issue." The BSB staff has once again assembled an interesting and eclectic group of people associated with Ohio State sports for interviews. One of the things I like about this issue is that you are hearing from the subjects in their own words, rather than reading a story that is filtered by the writer, who sometimes can, intentionally or unintentionally, put his or her own spin on a story.

The Interview Issue is always anchored by athletic director Gene Smith, who essentially gives his "state of the department" address. The thing that struck me in reading this year's

interview is Smith's total grasp of his huge department. He is knowledgeable about players, coaches, teams, facilities and on and on. I think some ADs end up isolated at the top and know little about their programs beyond football or basketball.

I chuckled at Smith's candor in talking about behavioral issues – or lack thereof – following the introduction of alcohol sales at Ohio Stadium.

"We didn't have any behavioral issues that people would think," he explained. "Actually our numbers were down on behavior issues, and I really think it's because there was less binge drinking just before you go in because you don't have to slam a couple anymore just before you go inside."

Luke Fickell was an interesting and logical choice as an interview subject after he ended a lengthy association with Ohio State to take the head coaching job at Cincinnati, where BSB editor Tim Moody tracked him down.

Fickell was also quite candid about his difficult year as interim head coach of the Buckeyes in 2011.

"I could write a book about the mistakes we made or I made," he says. "But I think the No. 1 mistake was trying to be somebody you weren't, and that's hard as a leader. In the midst of how you go about it I thought I had to be like Jim Tressell, and in reality you can't be like Jim Tressell. Nobody can. But I thought that was what was best to give us an opportunity to be successful and not have a bunch of different changes on people, whether they were the players or the coaches. That was just the conscious decision that I made, and it was probably the one that is detrimental because you can't be consistent being somebody that you're not."

But the thing that may have interested me most was his thoughts on the Nebraska game that year. I have always felt that was a game, if the outcome had been different, that might have changed the course of Ohio State football history. It was Ohio State's first trip to Lincoln after the Huskers joined the Big Ten, and the Buckeyes were well on their way to a win against the storied team when quarterback Braxton Miller was knocked out of the game.

"That will be the one you never, ever forget," Fickell said. "That was truly, I don't know that we ever recovered from that. We were in pretty good shape, we were doing pretty well, we were coming on and we never, ever as a team recovered from that."

"And I can't exactly tell you, yes we can say that Braxton went out with a twisted ankle and they rattled off maybe 30 unanswered points (actually 28). All I can tell you is I walked and ran to the locker room afterwards and I couldn't talk, couldn't speak, barely could stand up. I just remember my best friend Mike Vrabel just kind of grabbing me at the coach's locker and just saying, 'Hey, this is when they need you the most, you've got to be at your best.' And I couldn't tell you what was really said or whatever, but that's one of those memories that you'll never forget and one of those things I could never thank him enough for grabbing you, picking you up."

Everyone knew Fickell was in a tough situation that year and took one for the team by taking the job. If the Buckeyes had won that game, perhaps turned in a better record, it would have

been difficult to let the former Buckeye go, thus eliminating the hiring of Meyer.

Who knows where Ohio State football would be right now without Meyer?

It was my choice to have staff writer Ryan McGlade interview former Buckeye basketball player and current broadcaster Ron Stokes. What can I say? Stokes is my all-time favorite Buckeye basketball player, and I knew his story to be an entertaining one. This proved to be one of the longer interviews this year, and McGlade actually cut quite a bit out.

I was also interested to hear the tale of our very first subscriber, Norman Maki of Holden, Mass. I had no idea that Mr. Maki had never set foot in the state of Ohio. Thanks for your 36 years of support, Mr. Maki, and thanks for taking the time to chat with us.

In looking into Mr. Maki's subscription, we found that the next 30 or so subscribers all let their subscriptions lapse in 1989, never to come back. At first I was a bit baffled by this, but my best guess is they left after first-year football coach John Cooper led the Buckeyes to a 4-6-1 record in 1988. Poor Coop got off on the wrong foot, both on and off the field, with many Buckeye fans and never recovered from that, which is unfortunate.

As Fickell says in his interview, "The perception of John Cooper is he wasn't really great because he didn't beat Michigan and he didn't win a national championship when in reality he was great, he did some incredible things and he's a great man."

We also have timely interviews with Holtmann, after his first few days with the Buckeye basketball program, and volleyball coach Pete Hanson, who has led his team to two straight NCAA titles and was just selected to the OSU Athletics Hall of Fame, not to mention chats with wrestler Kyle Snyder, who will go down as one of the greatest athletes in Ohio State history, as well as kicker Mike Nugent, one of the most popular and successful Buckeyes ever.

Enjoy.

### Gee Leaves, Returns

As I have said so many times in this space, I love our "From the Pages of BSB" feature, found on page 2 of this issue, because so many things are ironic or funny when viewed with the retrospect of many years.

It was 20 years ago that popular OSU president E. Gordon Gee left Ohio State to take what he believed to be a once-in-a-lifetime job leading the Ivy League's Brown. According to BSB at the time, Gee declared it would be his last stop in higher education.

Gee would move on to Vanderbilt and back to Ohio State after his short tenure at Brown and then on to West Virginia for a second stint after he was dismissed from OSU for inappropriate comments.

By the way, Wikipedia claims that Gee, who also led Colorado, has been president of more universities than any American.

### Upgrade To First Class

With Ohio State football season less than 60 days away, now is the time to upgrade your existing subscription to speedy first-class mail in an envelope. If you received this copy of BSB after July 7, chances are you won't be receiving your BSB before the next football game during the season.

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