

Taylor Mikesell Returns Home With Transfer To Ohio State



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Prior to the start of the 2018-19 season, Ohio State women's basketball brought in three freshmen to group up with a handful of seniors and graduate transfers. This weird mix came after the reign of Kelsey Mitchell, Stephanie Mavunga and a roster that produced a large number of wins, but never made it past the Sweet 16 in the NCAA tournament.

Those three freshmen also showed flashes of potential that year. Those freshmen were Janai Crooms, Dorka Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty. None of them remain on the team heading into this season.

None of those players also came from within the state of Ohio. But a player who did from that same 2018 recruiting class was Taylor Mikesell, a former five-star guard out of Massillon Jackson.

Mikesell ranked as the No. 33 overall prospect and the top recruit from Ohio in that class. She ultimately chose to go to in-conference foe Maryland, where she would play in 66 games, 57 of which were wins, while also earning a pair of Big Ten regular season championships and one Big Ten tournament title.

That tournament win came in the 2019-20 season, and it came against Ohio State. That is still the last game Mikesell played in the Big Ten, but that will change soon after her decision to transfer to the Buckeyes back on April 29.

Mikesell is coming to Ohio State from Oregon, where she transferred to for a year after playing two seasons with the Terrapins. This time around, the 5-11 guard chose to come back to Ohio primarily because of its proximity to home.

"The main thing for me was just coming back closer to home, to be able to have my family see me play," Mikesell told BSB. "I'm like, an hour and 45 minutes from campus, so it's it's a quick drive home if I need to be home. It's a quick drive for my family to come see me. So that was really the biggest thing

that led to the decision.”

Mikesell comes to Ohio State with 90 total games of collegiate experience, averaging 11.5 points per game in those contests. Her area of expertise is shooting, specifically behind the arc. Over her career, Mikesell has connected on 224 three-pointers on 560 attempts, good for 40.0 percent from deep.

That strong efficiency has come on a high volume of attempts, over 6.2 per game, and can be a big part of the offense that Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff has in mind for his team.

“She can really score the ball, she’s an incredible three-point shooter. She’s also more of a playmaker than probably people realize, and I think she’s just a really good fit with the system and the style that we’ve evolved to,” McGuff told BSB. “We have gone very perimeter-oriented, even the forwards are playing on the perimeter, so that’s sort of the style that we’ve carved out. I think our kids have done a really good job taking to it, so we’re going to continue to play to our strengths, and I think with the group that we have and the skillset that these kids have, we can carve out a really exciting and effective style of play.”

The pairing of Mikesell with her in-state Big Ten team could have come at any of the three times that she was looking for her collegiate program. The Buckeyes recruited Mikesell out of Massillon Jackson and had interest when she went across the country to Eugene. But Mikesell said she previously preferred to go out of state, and McGuff said he’s just hoping that the journey to Ohio State will matter less now that she has finally arrived on campus for his team.

“She had a great high school career and unfortunately we didn’t get her out of high school,” McGuff said. “There were some COVID reasons why she went (to Oregon), it was a little bit less prevalent there than anywhere else in the country. But we would have liked to have gotten her then, too. Hopefully, this will be a story of all is well that ends well.”

In her two stops before coming to Ohio State, Mikesell has been a key cog in supremely talented rosters. She has started in 86 of the 90 games she has appeared in but has seen her role diminish with each season: shooting 11.1 times per game in her freshman year for the Terrapins, then 9.6 per game in year two before shooting 8.3 attempts per contest with the Ducks.

Mikesell’s efficiency also dipped at Oregon. After shooting 41.8 percent from deep in two years with Maryland, she connected on just 39 of her 117 three-point attempts with the Ducks, good for 33.3 percent.

But Mikesell has a chance to return to form back in the Big Ten, a conference that she said, despite her dip in production last year, is more balanced than what she faced in the Pac-12.

“They are definitely two different playing styles. I think the Big Ten is more fast paced and there’s more of an emphasis on the defensive end,” Mikesell said. “I think sometimes the Pac-12 gets a rep for being a more offensive dominant conference. I think the Big Ten, you have to play both sides of the ball ... It’s kind of an all-around game on the Big Ten’s front, so I’m excited to be back in the Big Ten. I think it’s one of the best conferences for women’s basketball.”

Mikesell’s experience with the Buckeyes currently is five games as their opponent, all of which ended in Maryland wins. In those games, she averaged 12.2 points per game and shot both 37.5 percent overall (18 of 48) and from three (12 of 32).

Despite the perfect record against Ohio State, Mikesell remembers those games as battles that were more difficult than the box score would represent.

"They were always great games, super competitive, and I obviously noticed that just from playing against them," Mikesell said. "They were all super close, they didn't play the score, like it was never what the score was. Just super competitive and really fast paced. I think the past couple years they've been pretty guard heavy, so they used that to their advantage. Just being able to pressure teams on defense, then get out and run in transition."

On the other end, McGuff said that Mikesell was always a key offensive weapon that the Buckeyes would have to specifically prepare for.

"She was really hard for us to guard," McGuff said. "She was very effective, especially on the offensive end, and we had a tough time guarding her. That was the biggest thing is she was already a real big focal point of our defense just because she's so deadly, especially from behind the three-point line."

Now, McGuff will now get to prepare his team for how to utilize Mikesell instead of how to defend her, but just when she will be utilized still remains a question. The NCAA has allowed for free transfers to another program, but only for one-time transfers. Because this is second time Mikesell has used the portal, she will have to get a waiver approved if she were to play for Ohio State this season.

Mikesell said that she will be trying for that waiver, but for the time being, she is set to sit out until the 2022-23 campaign. If that were to remain the case, the fourth-year junior guard said she will just have to be a leader from the sidelines instead of on the court.