

Three Buckeyes To Take Part In Senior Day Festivities On Wednesday



Ohio State guards Sean McNeil and Isaac Likekele and forward Justice Sueing will take part in Senior Day when the Buckeyes host No. 21 Maryland on Wednesday.

Despite closing out their careers in the scarlet and gray, all three of the players that will be honored did not begin their collegiate careers at Ohio State. Sueing arrived as a transfer ahead of the 2019-20 season after playing his first two seasons at California, sitting out a year due to transfer rules before appearing in 62 games across three campaigns for the Buckeyes. McNeil and Likekele spent the bulk of their college careers, playing at West Virginia and Oklahoma State before joining Ohio State prior to this season.

With all three Buckeyes arriving as transfers, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said the nature of Senior Day has changed, but still relished the opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of his players.

“It’s so unique. When I first got into this, Senior Day was so different than it is now,” Holtmann said. “You had guys that were kind of real seniors, and had graduated and had been in your program. You had some transfers, but for the most part it was guys that had been in your program, so your fan base really got to know them over a number of years. Now, it can be, in some ways, a hodgepodge of, ‘Is he a Senior? What does Senior Day look like?’ It’s just so different now.”

Starting with Sueing, the native of Honolulu, Hawaii, has spent the past four years in Columbus, but was held out his first season due to transfer rules while an abdominal injury kept him out of a majority of the 2021-22 campaign — in which he played just the first two games before sitting out the rest of the season to rehabilitate the injury.

In his first season of eligibility for the Buckeyes, Sueing played a key role for an Ohio State team that made a push in the Big Ten Tournament — falling to Illinois in the title game — before claiming a No. 2

seed in the NCAA Tournament. Unfortunately for Sueing and Co., Ohio State became the ninth No. 2 seed to fall to a No. 15 seed in the opening round, losing to Oral Roberts 75-72 in overtime. Despite the disappointing finish, Sueing averaged 10.7 points and 5.5 rebounds while shooting a career-best 36.1 percent from deep.

After opening the next season against Akron and Niagara, Sueing was declared out indefinitely and did not return to the floor until Ohio State's season-opener this year, in which he scored a game-high 20 points to push Ohio State to a 91-53 win over Robert Morris on Nov. 7, 2022. The season hasn't gone as planned for Sueing, however, as the Buckeyes have fallen to 12-17 while he's registered 12.0 points per game on 43.1 percent shooting and a 21.9 percent mark from three — the worst of his career.

Although Sueing has faced several difficulties during his Ohio State career, Holtmann acknowledged the value Sueing has had on the program in his time with the Buckeyes.

"Justice is a great kid, for one. He's a really thoughtful kid," Holtmann said. "He's had some real challenges this year and he's carried a heavy load with how we've struggled. But, I like where he's at right now, I like how he's playing. I thought he was terrific (against Illinois) and I think he's prepared to finish this thing well.

"But, he's a tremendous kid from a wonderful family. He's been here longer than anybody else," he continued. "He's went through sitting out and then playing and having a good year on a really good team, and then he had to deal with another injury where he's sitting out the whole season, and he's bounced back and it's been good to see."

As for Likekele and McNeil, the duo spent their final seasons of college eligibility with the Buckeyes after long stints in the Big 12.

Both McNeil and Likekele battled through off-the-court hardships in their time with the Buckeyes, with McNeil dealing with the death of a friend and the near-loss of his father to a heart attack in the span of 24 hours in November, while Likekele took some time away from the team for personal reasons in December, traveling to home state of Texas to be with his family.

"This year, personally, has probably been the toughest year I've ever gone through for a number of reasons," McNeil said. "I take it day-by-day, I'm just super grateful to be here and for my dad to be in the health he's in, and to mentally be where I'm at."

All in all, the duo of McNeil and Likekele each have played key roles for the Buckeyes this season. McNeil has served as a bucket-getter for the Buckeyes, averaging 9.6 points per game on a career-best 41.9 percent shooting, while Likekele has worn many hats as a primary ball-handler and facilitator, Ohio State's top perimeter defensive option and even a small-ball five.

Although the season hasn't gone as planned, with Ohio State likely to be held out of the NCAA Tournament, Holtmann recognized their leadership in the midst of a difficult campaign.

"Those two guys, they've been a bridge for us in a year when we've needed some experience," Holtmann said. "They've given us some stability. They've struggled at times, but they have a great approach. I really like where they're at right now and I love them both as kids."