

2022 NBA Draft: E.J. Liddell Drafted By New Orleans Pelicans With No. 41 Overall Pick



Former Ohio State standout forward E.J. Liddell was selected by the New Orleans Pelicans with the No. 41 overall pick in the second round of the 2022 NBA Draft on Thursday.

Liddell left his home state of Illinois to join the Buckeyes in 2019 after an illustrious high school career in which he led Belleville West to two consecutive state titles and garnered back-to-back Illinois Mr. Basketball awards — joining Jabari Parker as the only two-time winners of the award in state history.

In his three seasons at Ohio State, Liddell became a center figure for the program and emerged as a star in the Big Ten — collecting a pair of All-Big Ten First Team honors in his sophomore and junior seasons with the Buckeyes.

As a freshman, Liddell played 31 games in a limited bench role but showed flashes of his potential and posted his first career double-double with 17 points and 11 rebounds against Illinois on March 5, 2020.

Although Liddell's freshman season was largely in a relief role, the Belleville, Illinois, native made a significant jump during his sophomore campaign. He started in 31 games and served as the Buckeyes' second scoring option next to Duane Washington Jr., posting 16.2 points and 6.7 rebounds while shooting at 47.4 percent clip. Liddell's efforts helped the Buckeyes earn a No. 2 seed in the 2021 NCAA tournament, but Ohio State fell in historic fashion to 15th-seeded Oral Roberts in the opening round of the tournament despite Liddell's 23 points, 14 rebounds and five assists.

Following his sophomore season, Liddell tested the 2021 NBA draft waters — entering his name into professional consideration while maintaining his eligibility. He ultimately decided to return to Columbus for his junior season in a move in which his former head coach Chris Holtmann said paid off for him.

“He's run his own race. His race was to be in college for three years and grow and develop his game and he is a perfect example for what can happen when you return another year in college and you're in

sync with the coaching staff about player development and you get better,” Holtmann told 97.1 The Fan on Monday. “It doesn’t always happen, as a matter of fact, you could probably cite as many examples where guys kind of stay where they were or even in some ways they do lose some of their draft value.

“His draft value shot up. He improved by as many as 20 to 25 positions and it’s a credit to the kid.”

Liddell was one of the best players in the Big Ten in his final season as a Buckeye, leading the Buckeyes with 19.4 points and 7.9 rebounds per game while hitting shots at a 49 percent clip and expanding his range with a 37.4 percent three-point percentage. As the frontman for the Buckeyes, he led Ohio State to a 20-12 record and a No. 7 seed in the 2022 NCAA Tournament. While he made strides in his offensive game heading into his junior campaign, his biggest improvements came on defense as he became one of the best help defenders in the Big Ten and led the conference in blocks with 2.5 per game.

Throughout his three-year Buckeye career, Liddell posted averages of 14.1 points, 6.1 rebounds and 1.6 blocks. He became the 60th 1,000-point scorer in Ohio State program history during a 23-point outing against Minnesota on January 28.

Liddell announced that he would hire an agent and enter the 2022 NBA draft on March 25, signifying an end to his Ohio State career. He received first round grades for much of the NBA draft process and stood out the 2022 NBA Draft Combine, tallying the best standing vertical leap with a 35.50. He has also garnered comparisons to Boston Celtics forward Grant Williams during the draft process, a likeness that Holtmann agreed with.

While Liddell will mostly be remembered by Ohio State fans for his play on the court, Holtmann pointed to his selflessness as a defining trait of his success in the scarlet and gray.

“It helps when you have a guy like E.J., who is a really selfless star. And that’s what he was, he was a star in college basketball. I pushed pretty hard for him to be in consideration for player of the year,” Holtmann said.

Joining a front court that includes Zion Williamson and Brandon Ingram in New Orleans, Liddell will look to carve out a role for himself at the next level.