

Buckeyes Begin Difficult Road Stretch With Surging Nebraska



Coming off a bounce-back home victory over Penn State on Saturday, Ohio State will look for its winning ways to translate on the road this week, where it will travel to Lincoln, Nebraska, to take on Fred Hoiberg's Cornhuskers on Tuesday night before heading to Evanston, Illinois, for a matchup with Northwestern on Saturday.

These games are part of a difficult two-week stretch where the Buckeyes will play three of their next four games on the road, where wins have been hard to come by — or almost nonexistent — since the 2022-23 season. Ohio State has yet to secure a conference win away from Value City Arena in its last 12 attempts, with its last road victory coming on Jan. 1, 2023, against Northwestern.

Ohio State will get its next chance to end this extended losing streak when it faces off with the Cornhuskers on Tuesday night, although it will be a tough task for the team to achieve as Hoiberg's team enters the contest with a strong 14-5 record — 12 of those wins coming at their home Pinnacle Bank Arena — along with No. 5 scoring offense in the conference at 78.3 points per game.

Nebraska's fast start and surging offense has taken the league by storm in the last couple weeks, causing many experts to project the Cornhuskers as an NCAA tournament team for just the eighth time and program history and first time since 2014. Speaking with the media on Monday, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said Nebraska and Hoiberg have turned this team into an NCAA Tournament-type squad due to its heavy presence of experienced veterans on the roster, an effort that the Buckeyes coach said was made obvious by their recent activity in the NCAA transfer portal.

"A couple years ago, they went — and I'm sure it was a conscious decision by Fred (Hoiberg) — they got really old," Holtmann said. "They went and (got) transfers, and they just got really old. Fred's always been a really good coach. Terrific offensive coach, but always been a really good coach. And they have a great system that he's recruited older transfers to.

“But I think that’s probably been the biggest difference (this year), is they really hit the transfer market well. And you can see it.”

To Holtmann’s point, Nebraska boasts 11 players on their roster who have entered the program through the transfer portal, including four players that come from Power Five teams. Hoiberg’s most impactful transfer in the last few years comes from an unlikely source, that being former Ranger College guard and Moriyama Nagoya Aichi, Japan, native Keisei Tominaga, who arrived in the program in the 2021-22 season and is now the Cornhuskers’ leading scorer at 14.5 points per game.

Holtmann said that Tominaga, who also shoots at an efficient 38.1 percent clip from three and 46.9 percent from the field, will pose a great challenge for his team due to his elite shooting ability and constant movement on offense, something he thinks comes from senior’s relentless work-ethic and conditioning.

“(What makes him hard to guard) is his motor,” Holtmann said. “He’s incredibly fit. He has a really quick release, and he’s now been able to drive it and get to the free-throw line a little bit because of the amount of pressure he puts on the defense behind the arc.”

Nebraska’s hot shooting from three does not end with Tominaga, though. Beyond the former Ranger College star, the Cornhuskers have five players who have connected on at least 15 three-pointers, a list that even includes 6-foot-10 forward and Bradley transfer Rienk Mast, who has made 17 from beyond the arc while also dishing out a team-high 8.4 assists per game.

Holtmann said Nebraska’s team-wide success from beyond the arc allows them to space the floor and play from the perimeter no matter what lineup they put out on the court, making for a difficult guard for the Buckeyes on Tuesday.

“Their five-out system is hard,” Holtmann said. “They have five three-point shooters on the floor at times, that puts you in a really difficult spot. (Mast) has been terrific. He’s a 3-point shooting five-man who leads them in assists. Their five-out system is tailor made for what Fred has been trying to do. So their shooting puts a real premium (on us to defend), and they cut exceptionally well, and they have a big who can pass the heck out of it.”

“It’s going to really test us,” he added. “We’re going to be really on point with our defense, really on point. Because they can really shoot it. They can shoot it from multiple spots. And they are a real challenge to guard. Right now, they’re (No. 5) in the league in offense. Their pace is good, and they are just a terrific shooting team, particularly at home.”

Nebraska’s three-point shooting and fluid offensive scheme will put even more pressure on the Buckeyes as they look to secure their first conference road win in over a year. Holtmann said his team is not focused on ending the losing streak as they prepare for the Cornhuskers, but rather on coming away with a second straight victory and beginning a difficult conference stretch on the right note.

“These are good teams we are playing on the road,” Holtmann said. “And our focus is just to play as complete of a game as we can offensively and defensively, putting ourselves in position (to win). And knowing the competition we’re going to face.”

The Buckeyes and Cornhuskers are set to tip off at 7 p.m. with the game airing exclusively on Peacock.