

Chris Holtmann Looking For Transfers To Make A Difference In 2023-24



The Ohio State men's basketball program struggled in 2022-23, failing to make the postseason for the first time in the Chris Holtmann era (excluding the COVID-19-shortened 2019-20 season) and finishing with a less than ideal 16-19 record, but the Buckeyes' head coach is confident the program can get back on the right track with the help of his three talented and experienced transfers.

Taking the podium at the 2023 Big Ten Basketball Media Days held in Minneapolis' Target Center on Tuesday, Holtmann said he expects the transfer trio of fifth-year forward Jamison Battle (Minnesota), fifth-year guard Dale Bonner (Baylor) and sophomore guard Evan Mahaffey (Penn State) to make significant impacts in their first years with the program, saying each player brings a unique set of skills and intangibles that can help the team succeed in 2023-24.

"We are really pleased with the three transfers that we have," Holtmann said. "They've had a really good summer and fall, and I think every coach will come up here and talk about how excited he is about his team, but I really think that those three guys are going to have a real significant impact on this group."

Holtmann, who has been under increasing scrutiny by fans due to the team's lackluster performance last season and inability to have sustained postseason success in years prior, said that although the veteran Battle can provide leadership for a young Buckeyes' team, he can make the largest influence with his scoring ability. In his four collegiate seasons at George Washington (2019-2021) and Minnesota (2021-2023), Battle has produced on the offensive end, averaging 14.8 points per game on 42.4 percent shooting, including 34.9 shooting from three.

"Jamison Battle is obviously a proven multi-dimensional wing, guard-forward who has been able to score in the Big Ten for the past couple of seasons," Holtmann said. "So we're excited about his shooting and scoring that he is going to provide."

The Buckeyes' Coach said Battle can help boost Ohio State's offense this season, but he mentioned his other fifth-year transfer as a player who can help the program on the other side of the floor. Holtmann lauded the Baylor transfer for his rare athleticism and speed, something that can allow him to earn

extensive minutes in the Buckeyes' backcourt this season alongside sophomore point guard Bruce Thornton. Bonner has used these traits to his advantage in his senior season at Baylor in 2022-23, where he was a pest on the defensive end with a team-high 40 steals in 29 games (1.4 per game).

"Dale Bonner gives us really something that we haven't had maybe in our entire time at Ohio State in terms of his quickness, his ability to shoot the ball and how dynamic he can be," Holtmann said. "It just gives us a different element. Certainly you can play him and Bruce together, and we plan to do that pretty consistently."

Holtmann also offered his thoughts on Mahaffey, the youngest transfer on this year's team, at the Target Center. He added that despite his youth and relative inexperience compared to Battle and Bonner, the former Nittany Lion can emerge with his blossoming abilities on the court. In his freshman season with Penn State, Mahaffey averaged 2.8 points and 1.7 rebounds in 34 games, while shooting 56.9 percent from the floor.

"Evan is the youngest of the group," Holtmann said. "Evan has just spent a year in college, so he is a sophomore, and I think he is a growing, developing player."

With Holtmann sees his three transfers making their respective marks on the 2023-24 season with their individual skills, he also envisions a scenario where they can play a role in the development and progression of Ohio State's younger players, particularly contributing sophomores Roddy Gayle Jr., Bruce Thornton and Felix Okpara. This is something he and his staff thought about while searching through the transfer portal over the offseason, leading them to the acquisitions of the trio of new Buckeyes.

"When you have a young group of players, you can go out and recruit the player, but for us, we were looking for guys that we felt like could certainly make an impact, but could also allow these sophomores in particular to grow," Holtmann said. "All three of the transfers are going to play a really important role and a significant role. I really believe that. But we also wanted to balance that with the idea that these three sophomores that we have need to continue to grow and flourish as players."