

“Family” Drew Former Kentucky Center Aaron Bradshaw To Ohio State



Since assuming head coaching duties in February, Jake Diebler has instilled a culture built on cohesiveness and togetherness at Ohio State, a development that helped the Buckeyes finish the 2023-24 season strong while also earning Diebler the full-time job in March.

Diebler’s emphasis on family — something that he knows well after him and his wife, Jordyn, welcoming their fourth child, Julien, into their family on July 2 — has been evident throughout his first offseason leading the program. The program most notably welcomed numerous former Buckeyes back to Columbus in June for the team’s annual “Vet Week,” which saw notable alumni such as Clark Kellogg, E.J. Liddell, D’Angelo Russell and Duane Washington Jr. flock to the Schottenstein Center to spend time with the current team.

It is this type of culture that also helped convince some of Ohio State’s most heralded offseason additions to join Diebler’s program this spring through the transfer portal, including former Kentucky center and McDonald’ All-American center Aaron Bradshaw, who said during his first media availability as a Buckeye that Ohio State provided the exact family atmosphere he was searching for during his transfer recruitment.

“It was mainly a family thing with me,” Bradshaw said in front of local media in the Schottenstein Center interview room on July 9. “I’m not going to lie, coach Diebler has built a family around this program in the short time that he has been here. Just him doing that and showing that he cares about his players, that’s all I really ask for in a coach. So where else would I want to go?”

Now a part of what seems like the right family for Bradshaw at Ohio State, the 7-1 center hopes to take the next step in his development and emerge as a formidable interior player in the Big Ten following a difficult first season at Kentucky.

Despite coming into now-Arkansas head coach John Calipari’s program as a coveted five-star prospect

— a place that became a major pipeline for top young talent to play in the NBA during his 15-year stint leading the Wildcats — Bradshaw struggled to find consistent playing time with the Wildcats, notching just 4.9 points, 3.3 rebounds and 0.7 blocks in 13.7 minutes of action per game.

The 7-1 center, who was also slowed by a foot injury early in the season, may not have had the freshman year that many previous former Kentucky players experienced. But he did say his short time with the Wildcats provided him with a chance to grow as a person and player while learning how to trust himself amid adversity.

“How to stay poised,” Bradshaw said when asked what he learned while at Kentucky. “I learned a lot of patience there. So that just shaped me into the person I am now, basically.”

Now, that poise seems to be paying off for Bradshaw in his second collegiate stint at Ohio State. The former Wildcat has impressed many within the program since joining the Buckeyes this spring, including Diebler, who touched on the unique versatility his new center has shown on the court.

“His ability to do (many) things at his size has been great,” Diebler said on July 9 with Bradshaw sitting to his left. “And I would say we’re pushing him to do some things he’s not used to doing on the court, but he’s got the ability to do it. And I think a lot of it is just getting reps and experience. But he can shoot it. He can handle it. He can pass it. And to be able to do it at his size is really impressive.”

The former five-star has also brought a different aspect to the team that cannot be measured on the stat sheets. Junior forward Evan Mahaffey said his new teammate has exuded a positive and playful personality since he arrived to the team, something he said has become infectious within the roster as the team prepares for a challenging season.

“You see that a lot, just with his talk constantly on the court,” Mahaffey said on June 9. “Him being talkative on the sidelines when he’s not in as well, just giving energy to others all time. So it’s really refreshing, actually.”

“I’m basically just showing people that it is OK to be different. It is OK to smile. It’s OK to do stuff people don’t really like doing that much anymore,” said Bradshaw, who noted that he enjoys fishing in his free time but can only catch ‘the little ones.’ “You don’t see too many people just walking around smiling. They think it’s just like, ‘Oh, he’s just too happy.’ No. It’s alright to be goofy. It’s alright to be funny. It’s alright to have fun.”