

Felix Okpara Steps Into Big Man Role For Buckeyes



As Ohio State men's basketball head coach Chris Holtmann has placed considerable attention to improving defensively in recent years, he may have found an answer to help shore up the team's rim protection.

Standing at 6-11, freshman center Felix Okpara gained a reputation for his defensive acumen throughout his high school career. Okpara's large frame and quickness, despite his size, allowed him to become one of the more feared shot-blockers in the nation and Holtmann took notice.

"He's different than the bigs we've had, he's different than Zed," Holtmann said in his first media appearance following National Signing Day on Nov. 11, 2021. "He's really unique in his shot-blocking ability. At 6-11 and with about a 7-3 wingspan, I think he really provides a dimension that's exciting for us. He's quick off of his feet.

"We obviously needed to add another guy and we were looking for someone who could bring something different than Zed," he continued. "He's exciting for us."

While Okpara excelled as a basketball player during his high school years, his first true love was soccer. Growing up in Lagos, Nigeria, Okpara placed his primary focus on soccer until he moved to the United States when he was 18 years old. Just two years later, Okpara was already turning heads on the national scene, tallying 11 blocks against Oak Hill Academy in 2020.

As a junior at Chattanooga (Tenn.) Hamilton Heights Christian Academy, Okpara averaged 11.1 points, 7.9 rebounds and 2.6 blocks per game. Okpara opted to transfer to the more nationally-recognized Link Academy in Branson (Mo.) for his senior season, where he aided the program to the finals of the Geico National Tournament.

Okpara affirmed his commitment to Ohio State on July 26, 2021, and buzz quickly circulated around the

Buckeye fanbase that the Scarlet and Gray had finally found the true big man they were waiting for. Now officially a Buckeye, Okpara said that while he feels that he's ready to contribute right away, there's still room for him to get better before the season tips off in early November.

"I feel like I'm ready, but there's also a space of growth for everyone on the team too," Okpara said. "We're taking it one day at a time, getting better one percent every day. I feel like if we keep getting better by one percent every day before game time, everyone will be ready."

As Okpara prepares for his first collegiate season, as well as the notorious physicality of the Big Ten, he's placed specific attention on building strength in order to battle with some of the larger big men in the conference.

With the college basketball season fast approaching, with Ohio State's season opener on Nov. 7, Okpara noted that he's prepared to help this team in any way that he can.

"I'm ready to get in there and try to help my team win, whether I play two minutes or 15 minutes, I'm always ready," Okpara said. "This year, I don't really care if I play that much time in a game, I just want to see my team succeed and get better."