

Five Potential Candidates To Replace Chris Holtmann as Ohio State's Head Coach



Ohio State and athletic director Gene Smith sent shockwaves through Columbus and the entire college basketball landscape on Wednesday when they parted ways with former head coach Chris Holtmann after seven seasons leading the program, a move that comes after the Buckeyes dropped their 16th-consecutive road game and their 25th Big Ten game in their last 34 tries Tuesday night against Wisconsin.

Holtmann's firing puts Smith and Ohio State in unfamiliar territory, as they will have to conduct a coaching search for the first time since 2017 and just the second time in 19 years. Although Smith and his administration have little experience making coaching changes — particularly when the season is still ongoing — there are several candidates coaching in college basketball today that can serve as viable options for the program moving forward.

Here are five potential candidates who can replace Holtmann and become Ohio State's 16th men's basketball coach:

1. **Sean Miller — Xavier Head Coach**

Miller returned to Xavier — where he earned his first head coaching in 2004 — in 2022 and instantly elevated the program, taking his team to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in four seasons and finishing with a 27-10 record. Miller's Musketeers haven't been able to replicate that same success this season, holding just a 13-11 record, but that doesn't discredit his coaching abilities. Prior to his time at Xavier, Miller led the Wildcats to a combined 302-109 record (.735) winning percentage, five Pac-12 regular season championships, three conference tournament championships and seven NCAA Tournament appearances.

Miller also has ties to former Ohio State head coach Thad Matta, having served as associate head coach under him at Xavier from 2001-2004.

2. Lamont Paris — South Carolina Head Coach

Paris, a Findlay, Ohio, native, may not have the gravitas that Miller holds in the collegiate head coaching ranks, having spent just two seasons coaching for a Power Five program before spending five years leading the Southern Conference's Chattanooga. But he has quickly emerged as a rising star in the industry due to his performance at South Carolina this season. Paris' first year with the Gamecocks was a disappointment, as they went 11-21 and finishing 12th in the SEC standings. That all has been erased this year, as he has lifted the program — led by former Ohio State and Holtmann recruit Meechie Johnson — to a 21-3 record and a 9-2 record in conference play, a mark that has them ranked first place in the SEC and No. 11 in the nation.

The open vacancy at Ohio State may entice Paris to return to both his home state and the Big Ten, where he previously served as an assistant coach under Wisconsin from 2010-2017.

3. Greg McDermott — Creighton Head Coach

McDermott is arguably the most decorated and experienced candidate in this list, having been a head coach since the 2001-2002 season, including the last 14 seasons as the head honcho at Creighton. McDermott has helped turn the Blue Jays into one of the more highly-respected and competitive non-Power Five teams in the country during his tenure, leading the program to an impressive 318-157 record (.669) and eight NCAA Tournament appearances. His best coaching performance may have come a season ago, where he led the Blue Jays to their first Elite Eight Appearance in program history. McDermott, a Cascade, Iowa, native, has no ties to Ohio State or the Big Ten. He recently agreed to a multi-year contract extension with Creighton in 2022.

4. Buzz Williams — Texas A&M Head Coach

Aside from his 17 years in head coaching, the obvious draw of Williams to Ohio State is his connection to incoming athletic director Ross Bjork. The two men spent the last five seasons together at Texas A&M, with Williams being anointed as head coach in April of 2019 and Bjork taking over as athletic director that next month. With Bjork as his athletic director, Williams amassed a combined 76-56 record (.576) and took his team to the NCAA Tournament once in 2022-23, a year in which he also won SEC Coach of the Year. He also has the Aggies on track to reach the tournament again this season, with the team currently holding a 15-9 record.

Williams, who recorded a combined 239-138 record in his previous two stints at Marquette (2008-2014) and Virginia Tech (2014-2019) has no real ties to Ohio State. But he did speak glowingly of the Buckeyes when his Aggies team faced off against the Buckeyes on Nov. 10, specifically praising the talents of sophomore guard Bruce Thornton and calling him the catalyst of the Buckeyes' offense and a "hard guard."

5. Jeff Boals — Ohio University Head Coach

Boals may be the biggest “wild card” on this list, as he has never led a Power Five school. But his history coaching at Ohio State and his success leading Ohio University in his five seasons may warrant some interest from Bjork, or at least an interview. Boals served as an assistant on Matta’s staff at Ohio State from 2009-2016, helping the Buckeyes gain a berth to the NCAA Tournament in six of those seven seasons along with a Final Four berth in 2012. But the longtime Ohioan was perhaps most valuable to the program with his recruiting, where he reportedly played a large role in the signings of the premier players of that era of Ohio State basketball, such as Jared Sullinger, D’Angelo Russell and Aaron Craft.

Boals’ success extends beyond Ohio State, too, where he earned a 55-42 record for Stony Brook in his first coaching stint in 2016-2019 before taking over at Ohio University in 2019 and boasting a 91-58 record (.611) across the last five seasons. That stretch included the program’s first-ever NCAA Tournament appearance in 2020-21, the Bobcats’ first since 2012.