

# Former Ohio State Center Felix Okpara Sheds Light On Decision To Transfer



Former Ohio State center Felix Okpara shocked many when he announced he was entering the transfer portal on April 21, less than a week after initially pledging his allegiance to the Buckeyes for the 2024-25 season.

While many people who closely follow the program thought Okpara — who is now playing for Tennessee — changed tune because of concerns over more limited playing time next season following Ohio State’s transfer portal addition of 7-1 former Kentucky center Aaron Bradshaw on April 15, the Lagos, Nigeria, native made it clear that Bradshaw played no part in his decision to depart for Knoxville, Tenn.

Instead, it was the sudden losses of his now-former teammates that compelled him to leave and find what he thought was a better opportunity to elevate his career at another school.

“I decided to come back then, then guys started leaving,” Okpara told the Columbus Dispatch, his first comments made since the transfer. “At that point, I didn’t feel like I really made the best decision for myself. I was going off what other people were doing. My family, we talked a lot and they’re like, ‘We’ve got to do what’s best for you. You have two more years of college basketball. You have to make the best of it.’

“Bradshaw didn’t really have anything to do with this,” he added. “When I committed to come back, then when everyone started leaving I started questioning. That had been going on for like a week before Bradshaw even committed.”

Okpara’s first comment alludes to the significant roster overhaul the Buckeyes experienced since their impressive 8-3 end to the 2023-24 season, a stretch that included the program hiring Jake Diebler as head coach and the team reaching the quarterfinal round of the NIT.

While Diebler and the Buckeyes began the offseason with a bang — securing a transfer portal

commitment from former Ohio State and South Carolina guard Meechie Johnson along with in-house commitments from key 2023-24 contributors Bruce Thornton, Devin Royal and even Okpara — they followed that with a number of key roster losses, with starting guard Roddy Gayle Jr. along with role players Bowen Hardman, Zed Key, Scotty Middleton all entering the portal and finding new homes in April.

These departures seemed to have played a significant factor in Okpara's decision to leave, allowing him to realize that playing for Ohio State next season may not put him in the best position to succeed and reach his full potential, one he has been searching for since he began his collegiate career in Columbus.

"The main rundown is I want to do what's best for me, and I felt Ohio State wasn't best for me at that point because the last two years weren't the best," he said. "My family felt I needed a change and I kind of felt I needed a change, too."

Okpara, like he alluded to in his April 21 social media post that revealed his decision to transfer, said he appreciated Diebler's efforts during the last 11 games of the season, and also said that he felt more comfortable leaving the Buckeyes knowing that Bradshaw was joining the team.

But the 6-11 center is now entirely focused on taking his career to new heights at Tennessee next season. Now playing at a school that is around 110 miles northeast of his parents' home in Chattanooga, Tenn., Okpara said he is looking forward to playing closer to his family and finishing his career strong for a Rick Barnes-led program that he feels has established a culture that matches his identity as a player.

"They're a really good defensive team," Okpara said. "They've had success. The last five years they've been top-five defensively in the country, and I'm a defensive player. I feel I can come in and produce right away. They have a really good coach, Rick Barnes. I feel like I can learn a lot from him."

"I was thinking of my last two years playing college basketball and how I want to make it better and at least win and go to the (NCAA) Tournament. I was at a point where I had to decide what's going to be best for me. It's been really tough, these last two years at Ohio State, basketball-wise. It was a personal decision."