

Freshman Center Ivan Njegovan Showing Promise In Frontcourt For Buckeyes



The Buckeyes have shown promise on both ends of the floor in recent weeks, but they can take their play a step further with improved production in the frontcourt, an area of the floor that has been a weakness for the team all year.

Ohio State has yet to see former five-star forwards Aaron Bradshaw and Sean Stewart blossom into the stars they were touted to be coming out of high school — with the two sophomores combining to average just 6.5 points and 4.5 rebounds thus far this season — but it has received some promising play of late from 7-1 true freshman and Otocac, Croatia, native Ivan Njegovan.

Njegovan, who signed with Ohio State on July 30 after playing last season for the Croatian Premier League team KK Bosco, has seemingly jumped sophomore center Austin Parks in the frontcourt depth chart and is making the most of his extra opportunities. After totaling just 14 points and nine rebounds in 30 minutes of action in his first eight collegiate games, he has notched 15 and 17 in 60 in his last eight contests, while also tacking on six blocks on defense.

When asked about the Croatian freshman's play on Monday, Diebler said he has been happy with his production and that he has taken great strides to advance his game since joining the program in the summer.

"I've been so impressed with Ivan," he said. "Just the commitment he has to being a good player right now is as good as anybody on our team. He's spending extra time. His body's changing. He told me he's grown a little bit since he's been here. So we'll take that."

Diebler added that he began to see Njegovan improving his game well before this recent stretch of positive play, first turning heads while going toe-to-toe with the Buckeyes' bigs in practice with the scout team before slowly working his way up to eventually earn significant playing time during games. This rise, according to the Buckeyes' coach, is a testament to the patience and consistency he has

shown all year.

“You have to remember, he didn’t have a summer, so give him credit, he stayed consistent,” he said. “And really in the last six weeks, he’s kind of taken it even up a level when he wasn’t getting minutes, and I think it speaks a lot to who he is and how much he cares and how much it shows he wants to be a really good player. He’s earned the right to play well.”

With Ohio State still set to face off against several formidable frontcourts in the Big Ten this season, it will need Njegovan to continue providing a strong presence inside, which Diebler thinks his freshman is more than capable of doing the rest of the way.

“We have trust in him. And I think he knows that,” Diebler said. “And now he has some confidence, too.”