

Jake Diebler Embracing New Challenges As Ohio State Head Coach, Excited About Direction Of Program



As he approaches his third month as Ohio State men's basketball head coach, Jake Diebler has come to realize that serving as the face of the program carries a little different weight than being the second or third person in line.

Diebler, who described his first three months in the head coaching chair as a "blur," said he can no longer go about his normal routine in Columbus without being recognized by Ohio State fans who are excited to hear about the upcoming season, a development that he noted as an interesting lifestyle change for the 37-year-old who began his coaching career as a video coordinator for Ohio State in 2014.

"It's different," Diebler said Monday morning at Value City Arena in his first press conference since the team's NIT quarterfinal loss to Georgia in March. "I got my few coffee spots I like to hit in the morning, (that's) changed. I can't sneak in there anymore, sneak in and out, which is fine. I've met some great people, I've heard some really awesome stories. People who have been lifelong Buckeye fans, or people who moved into the state who are now Buckeye fans...Yeah, it's different. But it's all good."

While Diebler has experienced a bit of a culture shock as head coach of a high-profile college basketball program around the city, he has also had to deal with the many new challenges that come with being leader on the hardwood, particularly with the increasing player and staff movement that exists in college basketball during a hectic transfer portal and NIL era.

It's a new set of tasks that Diebler acknowledged has been an adjustment for him, but also one that he is fully embracing heading into his first full year as Buckeyes' leader.

"You have to be able to adapt," he said. "The days of having a true understanding of what your roster is going to look like a year in advance, those days are mostly over...But I choose to kind of look at it as a positive. It allows us the flexibility every offseason to be able to bring in the right pieces...But the days of summer being kind of, 'Oh, we'll be a little more laid back' — you can't do that anymore."

Diebler and Ohio State found out that harsh reality even before the summer hit, with six players — starters Roddy Gayle Jr. and Felix Okpara and reserves Bowen Hardman, Zed Key and Scotty Middleton — transferring from the program within the first month of the portal being opened.

While many of these departures likely came as a disappointment for Ohio State — especially after a promising 8-3 end to the 2023-24 season — Diebler said that he felt the program responded well during the spring months, bringing in a quartet of high-impact transfers, former five-stars Aaron Bradshaw and Sean Stewart, former Ohio State commit and South Carolina standout Meechie Johnson and former San Diego State starting wing Micah Parrish, who he thinks can not only match the high-paced style of play the program wants to play with but also bring in a winning mentality that could help a relatively young roster reach the next step in 2024-25 and beyond.

“We certainly wanted to structure the roster that fit, a little bit more, the style that we want to play moving forward,” Diebler said. “Versatility is important, and it makes us harder to guard and allows us to be a little more creative defensively. So we were intentional about that.

“And the other thing we were intentional about, all four of those guys were in the NCAA Tournament and won at a certain level last year. So that was something I’m really excited about, their experience. I mean, Micah played in the National Championship Game two years ago, went to the Sweet Sixteen (last season). Meechie’s helped lead South Carolina to the best season they’ve had in a long time. And Aaron and Sean, for being young players, to be able to get NCAA Tournament experience is really valuable.”

While there is still some time until the value of this transfer class is truly determined for Ohio State, Diebler said he feels the overall offseason — which includes everything from staffing hires to increased season ticket sales — has been a positive development for his program, a development that he said excites him as he inches closer to his first season as the head man in charge.

“People have asked me a lot like, ‘Okay, what’s the biggest difference?’” Diebler said. “There’s certainly added stress, pressure, whatever it may be. But also, I’m having a blast. It’s been a lot of fun. I’m excited about this group. (I’m) really excited about our staff...excited about our roster. It’s been a fun spring.”