

# Jake Diebler's Tough Love Helps Aaron Bradshaw Untap Potential



It's been a rollercoaster of a season for Ohio State sophomore forward Aaron Bradshaw.

Coming in as a highly-touted transfer from blue blood Kentucky, the 7-1 New Jersey native was pitted to be one of the new-look Buckeyes' more important pieces in the frontcourt, a reputation that helped him earn a starting spot on the team for the first four games of the season.

Bradshaw showed flashes in those contests, averaging 7.8 points and 4.8 rebounds per game, but any positive momentum he may have had in that span was halted when he hit some major adversity.

Just before the Buckeyes' Nov. 22 game Campbell, he was forced to step away from the team as the university investigated an alleged domestic incident that occurred at his off-campus apartment, one which lasted weeks and forced him to miss the team's next seven games.

Bradshaw returned to the team in late December, just in time for him to play against his old team on Dec. 21 at Madison Square Garden and once again show off his talents, scoring 11 points on 5-of-6 shooting in the upset win over the Wildcats.

But since then, he hasn't quite made the impact that his coaches and Buckeye fans had hoped for. Bradshaw has struggled to find his rhythm on both ends of the floor over the last several weeks of Big Ten play, recording double figures in points in just one of his next 11 games while also averaging just 2.5 rebounds and 2.6 fouls per contest.

With just under one month of regular season action to play and Bradshaw still yet to have lived up to his potential, the Buckeyes and Jake Diebler looked to put some tough love on the former five-star in practice prior to their game against Washington on Wednesday night, a decision that Bradshaw seemed to embrace.

“He likes to challenge me, he likes to get in your face and talk to you a lot,” Bradshaw said after the Washington game. “He made sure that — the key of the whole game was to be physical — so he made sure I was physical. He did a little antics and stuff like that to make sure that I was on edge the whole time.”

Diebler’s “antics” seemed to light a fire under Bradshaw against the Huskies. In a game that the Buckeyes needed to win to keep their solid NCAA tournament resume in check, the former Wildcat had one of his better outings of his scarlet and gray tenure, netting 12 points on a perfect 5-of-5 shooting while recording three rebounds, one assist, one block, one steal to help lead the team to a 24-point blowout win.

Bradshaw’s impressive outing — which also included two three-point makes on as many attempts — was a positive development for Diebler, who had been adamant about wanting more from Bradshaw and the other Buckeye bigs during their push for the postseason.

Diebler was happy to see the sophomore — along with the rest of his forwards and centers — show some confidence on the floor and make a significant impact against the Huskies, one which can completely change the way the offense operates as a whole.

“I believe in his ability to make shots, especially when he has that time and space like he had tonight,” Diebler said. “He has the freedom to do that because he works on it.”

“(Getting production from Bradshaw and other bigs) helps,” he added. “Him, Sean (Stewart), Evan (Mahaffey), those guys combined (to shoot) 10 for 13 from the floor. That’s great. That efficiency from that unit is really important ...and (Bradshaw) certainly led the way.”

As for Bradshaw, the 7-footer said his positive outing against Washington was a result of him trusting the process and continuing to work on his craft no matter what struggles he may be facing.

“(I’ve been) praying a lot, talking with my family and just working, man,” Bradshaw said. “Just trying to be the best me I can be every single day. Step after step, day after day.”

Bradshaw’s outing is an encouraging sign for a Buckeyes’ team that will need significant production from its frontcourt players if it wants to make a run to the NCAA tournament. While this is a positive step for him and his development, Bradshaw said he is far from a finished product on the court and is continuing to fine-tune his game as the regular season winds down to its final weeks.

“Just keep going, it’s not going to stop there,” Bradshaw said. “Keep working. Keep playing. Keep praying.”