

Key Set To Make Homecoming Trip For CBS Sports Classic



Hailing from Bay Shore, N.Y., Ohio State forward Zed Key grew up less than 50 miles from the most iconic venue in basketball: Madison Square Garden.

While the Garden typically serves as the home of the NBA's New York Knicks and NHL's New York Rangers, the renowned arena will also host No. 23 Ohio State and North Carolina on Saturday at 3 p.m. as part of the CBS Sports Classic. With Key set to return to the Empire State, he emphasized his eagerness to get the opportunity to play in front of his family and friends upon his arrival.

"I'm really excited," Key said. "I'm definitely looking forward to traveling back to my home state and playing (in this game)."

Key — who leads the Buckeyes in scoring with 14.3 points per game, alongside a team-best 8.7 rebounds per game — noted that he's had to secure a good deal of tickets for his family and friends ahead of his first collegiate game in his home state.

"I was joking about this, you're going to look into the stands and there's going to be a Zed Key section in Madison Square Garden," Key said.

Awaiting Key in New York is a North Carolina team that has stumbled out of the gates to start the 2022-23 season. The Tar Heels — riding high off of a National Championship appearance last season — has endured a 7-4 start, which included a four-game skid with losses to Iowa State, then-No. 18 Alabama, then-No. 10 Indiana and Virginia Tech. Since then, however, North Carolina has registered back-to-back wins over Georgia Tech and The Citadel.

As North Carolina is trending upward after the adverse stretch, Key said that the Tar Heels will be a difficult test for the Buckeyes. Key will also face a matchup nightmare in Tar Heels forward Armando Bacot, who averages 16.4 points and 11.3 rebounds, the fifth-best mark in the nation.

“They’ve gotten a lot of hate right now because they’ve lost a couple of games, but they’re a really good team,” Key said. “Bacot is a really good player. He’s had 54 or 55 double-doubles (in his career). That just shows you how good of a player he is and what he brings to the table.”

Key will also square off against fellow New Yorker and North Carolina guard RJ Davis, who grew up in White Plains, N.Y. — which rests just 60.1 miles from Key’s hometown of Bay Shore. Although Key acknowledged that the pair haven’t exchanged friendly trash talk prior to the game, he said that they’ll relish the opportunity to return to their home state.

“He’s more from the city, obviously, I’m from Long Island,” Key said. “We’re both going back to our home state and playing in the world’s most famous arena on national television. I know we’re both excited.”