

Liddell Named Top 10 Semifinalist Naismith Trophy



Less than 24 hours after Ohio State's upset loss to Penn State in the Big Ten Tournament's second round, Buckeye forward E.J. Liddell appeared as one of 10 semifinalists for the Naismith Trophy Men's Player of the Year award.

Liddell remains in the hunt with Gonzaga's Chet Holmgren, Wisconsin's Johnny Davis and Illinois' Kofi Cockburn. There are six other players on the list, including Kansas' Ochai Agbaji, Arizona's Benedict Mathurin, Iowa's Keegan Murray, Gonzaga's Drew Timme and Kentucky's Oscar Tshiebwe.

Tshiebwe might have the inside track to the award. The Lubumbashi, Congo, native, averages 17.3 points on 60.6 percent shooting, while his 15.3 rebounds per game lead the nation. According to ESPN Stats and Info, Tshiebwe's 25 double-doubles this season are the most of any SEC player in the last 25 years. In Kentucky's regular-season finale, Tshiebwe scored 27 points and grabbed 14 rebounds and three steals in 36 minutes.

Liddell started in all 30 of Ohio State's games this season, averaging 19.6 points on 49.2 percent shooting. He also added 7.9 rebounds, 2.5 assists and 2.6 blocks per contest. The Belleville, Ill., native, was first-team All-Big Ten selection by the coaches and media. The coaches also named him to the league's All-Defensive team.

"It's been the kind of season you would hope someone would have when they decide to return to school," Holtmann said after Liddell won All-Big Ten honors. "It doesn't always work out like that, you don't always improve your stock by coming back - I could rattle off 20 cases like that. It's happened with him and it's a credit to his work and his buy-in to what we've been challenging him with.

"We made a commitment to E.J. and his family that he would play and defend on the perimeter and there have been times where that's been an adjustment for all of us but it's something we've committed to and it's really been good for him and his growth and it's also helped people see him in a good way. But almost every aspect of his game has improved and that's what you want from a guy coming back. That's a byproduct of E.J. being E.J. and I'm really happy for him."