

Men's Basketball Year In Review: Kalen Etzler/Bowen Hardman



Ohio State entered the 2022-23 campaign with the expectation that it would be sparked by its depth rather than its star power.

Although the Buckeyes played nine or 10 deep for much of the regular season, a few contributors filled deep bench roles, staying ready to hear their numbers called. Redshirt freshman forward Kalen Etzler and freshman guard Bowen Hardman both factored in as deep rotational pieces for head coach Chris Holtmann, with both Buckeyes playing less than 10 games during an adverse 16-19 campaign.

Etzler and Hardman's appearances during the season were largely reserved for the waning minutes of blowouts, with Etzler and Hardman each averaging 3.0 minutes per game. Across nine appearances, Etzler tallied 0.8 points and 1.3 rebounds per game while Hardman registered 1.7 points per game behind a 50.0 percent mark from deep in seven games.

Joining the Buckeyes as a three-star prospect out of Cincinnati Princeton, Hardman was the lowest-rated recruit out of Ohio State's five-man freshman class, slotting in as the No. 68 shooting guard in the class, according to 247Sports. Although Hardman didn't expect to play much during his first season with the Buckeyes, he had several key goals for the campaign.

"The biggest thing for me is just developing even more," Hardman said during Ohio State's media day on Sept. 26, 2022. "Also, being the best teammate I can possibly be, whether that's being on the bench and cheering for my teammates or just getting in practice and hitting shots."

In Hardman's case, Holtmann emphasized patience for the sharp-shooting guard, noting that his acclimation process would be a longer track than the other four freshmen on the roster. But, Hardman showed that he had the ability to get hot in a flash during Ohio State's 101-57 win over Chaminade in its Nov. 2, 2022, exhibition matchup, scoring 12 points while connecting on 4 of 6 three-point attempts across 9:37 of action.

“It was a byproduct of the game,” Holtmann said about Hardman after the exhibition win. “He’s just not physically ready to be able to play both ends. He’s a terrific shooter, but he’s not physically ready to compete on both ends.”

Hardman played in Ohio State’s first two games, in which he only tallied a missed three-point attempt across seven total minutes of action. He scored all 12 of his total points during a two-game stretch against Maine and Alabama A&M, connecting on a pair of three-pointers in each contest. During the span, Hardman shot 4 of 6 from beyond the arc. He also saw action against Maryland on March 1 and Michigan State on March 10, playing less than two minutes across the pair of games.

Etzler entered the season coming off of a redshirt campaign in 2021-22, and he noted that the year of growth and observation helped him prepare for his collegiate career moving forward.

“It’s crazy what you can do in a week, a few months, and obviously, a full year now,” Etzler said. “The amount of strength I’ve gained, and the amount of willpower — willpower is what I like to call it, but it’s just learning the game. But, I feel like I’m ready.”

Etzler appeared in Ohio State’s first three games of the season, going scoreless but tallying six total rebounds across 14 minutes of action. The Van Wert native scored the first bucket of his career during Ohio State’s 81-53 win over Cincinnati during the Maui Invitational on Nov. 22, 2022, a game in which he produced two points and one rebound.

He tallied the rest of his 7 total points in the next two games for the Buckeyes, collecting his only make from deep against St. Francis (Pa.) on Dec. 3, 2022, before scoring two points and tallying a pair of rebounds against Maine on Dec. 21, 2022. He made three more appearances from that point, but only tallied more than a minute once in that span, playing two minutes against Alabama A&M. He did not tally a countable statistic in each of his last three appearances.

While neither Etzler nor Hardman saw the floor much during the 2022-23 campaign, they were linked with one another off of the floor as roommates. Hardman said prior to the season that he was forging a connection with Etzler and that he saw a similar career track to his roommate going forward in his career.

“We have a lot of conversations and a lot of talks,” Hardman said. “He’s been a huge help for me, not just in my development, but mentally too.”