

Men's Basketball Year In Review: Roddy Gayle Jr.



While Ohio State saw immediate contributions from freshmen Bruce Thornton, Brice Sensabaugh and Felix Okpara, fellow first-year Buckeye Roddy Gayle Jr. was a late bloomer.

Gayle appeared in all 35 games for Ohio State and saw his role gradually increase as the season wore on. Across the first 24 games of the season, Gayle registered just one start while playing 13.0 minutes per game, but saw a distinct increase in playing from there, starting in 10 of Ohio State's final 11 games and tallying 23.0 minutes per game during the stretch. In all, Gayle produced 4.6 points and 1.6 rebounds per game while shooting 44.0 percent from the field.

During the Big Ten Tournament is when Gayle truly broke out, producing back-to-back career-high scoring outputs during Ohio State's quarterfinal and semifinal matchups, while shooting 9 of 11 from three and averaging 12.0 points per game across the four tournament games.

"(The Big Ten Tournament) was a learning experience for me. Especially with Brice out, our offense was a little bit stagnant so I felt like that was an opportunity for me to step up," Gayle said after Ohio State's semifinal loss to Purdue on March 11. "It was definitely a confidence booster, just knowing that my teammates and coaches have confidence in me. It allows me to play more freely."

By all initial indications, it appeared that Gayle was on track to be an essential contributor for the Buckeyes after posting 8.0 points per game on 52.9 percent shooting — including a 66.7 percent mark from three — across Ohio State's first three games. However, Gayle saw his offensive production slide quite a bit while in the Maui Invitational, only scoring two points across the three games in Hawaii.

Gayle tallied his lone double-digit scoring output of the regular season shortly after the Maui Invitational, posting 12 points on 5-of-6 shooting against St. Francis (Pa.) on Dec. 3, 2022. While Gayle's scoring numbers dwindled, he leaned on his defensive acumen in order to maintain his spot in the rotation.

"He's a two-way player, his defense is ahead of his offense," Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said in December. "He's got a chance to grow offensively, I think we could see a different player come February, offensively, than what we do now. He's got to keep working.

"He's 6-4, long, with good defensive instincts. He can really move and we need that."

Gayle remained a defensive specialist for the Buckeyes throughout the season, while largely taking a backseat in the offense to Thornton, Sensabaugh and Ohio State's veterans. During the season as a whole, Gayle only tallied 4.0 field goal attempts per game.

He made the first start of his career on Jan. 21 against Iowa, opening the game in relief of guard Sean McNeil — who came off the bench after a dental emergency limited his ability to start — and helped Ohio State snap a five-game losing streak, producing nine points in the Buckeyes' 93-77 win over the Hawkeyes.

Gayle returned to the bench for the next five games, all losses for Ohio State. With the Buckeyes standing at 11-13 entering their Feb. 12 matchup against Michigan State, Holtmann elected to make Gayle a regular starter, kicking off a stretch in which he started 10 of 11 games. Across the final seven games of the regular season, in which he made six starts, Gayle produced 3.3 points and 1.3 rebounds per game while playing 21.0 minutes per contest.

Gayle's run through the Big Ten Tournament began unceremoniously, as the Buckeye guard registered just 4 points on 2-of-3 shooting in Ohio State's first-round victory over Wisconsin on March 8. He appeared to be heading toward a similar result in the following game against Iowa, going scoreless across the game's first 34 minutes. But, Gayle exploded from there, scoring nine of Ohio State's final 16 points to carry the Buckeyes to a 73-69 victory over the Hawkeyes.

"Roddy's a gamer. He's been showing it in practice. We all have belief in him," McNeil said of Gayle's late scoring outburst against the Hawkeyes. "It was just a matter of time before a night like this was bound to happen. Credit to Roddy, he's a big part of why we won tonight."

Gayle carried that momentum into Ohio State's quarterfinal matchup with Michigan State, where he scored 12 of his 15 points in the second half to aid the Buckeyes to a 68-58 win over the Spartans. He connected on all three of his three-point attempts in the contest.

Unlike his previous two outings against Iowa and Michigan State, Gayle jumped on top-seeded Purdue early in the semifinal. During the first half, Gayle produced 16 of his team-high 20 points, sinking five threes across the game's first 20 minutes. However, his efforts would not be enough as the Buckeyes could not overcome Purdue center Zach Edey's 32 points and 14 rebounds, falling 80-66 on March 11.

Although Gayle did not receive the opportunity to showcase his talents during the NCAA Tournament, with the Buckeyes falling just short of snatching the Big Ten's automatic bid and making a surprise appearance in the dance, he recognized that the conference tournament allowed him an opportunity to build momentum toward next season. But, Gayle also made it clear that Ohio State's regular season struggles will serve as a motivating factor for him during the offseason.

"I'll always look on the tough times because that's just a simple way to learn," Gayle said. "But I will take this energy and this feeling of disappointment from the season and kind of channel it into anger and make sure we have a better start. I think we'll be a better team."