

Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep Five-Star 2025 Power Forward Niko Bundalo Impressed With Ohio State On First Official Visit



Ohio State and head coach Jake Diebler are in strong pursuit of one of the top prospects in the 2025 class, Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep five-star combo Darryn Peterson (6-5, 195), but Peterson is not the only highly touted recruit that the program has heavy interest in this recruiting cycle.

The Buckeyes are also after Peterson's new teammate at Prolific Prep and fellow Northeast Ohio native, five-star power forward Niko Bundalo (6-10, 215), who the program has made a great impression on following what the top prospect deemed a successful first official visit to Ohio State's campus this past weekend.

Bundalo, the nation's 26th-best player, seventh-best power forward and fourth-best player in California who placed the Buckeyes in his top eight, said that although returning to his home state to play college basketball could be an extra plus, the visit further solidified his belief that Ohio State has much more to offer than just being close to home.

"There's not a lot of kids that can go back to a home-state college and at the same time not really lose anything by being there," he told the Columbus Dispatch after his visit. "Maybe it's too small of a market or maybe it's a low-major or mid-major school. Ohio State's as big as it gets, and it's right in my backyard. It's a really unique opportunity for me."

Bundalo indicated that another extra factor in his interest in Ohio State is his already preexisting relationship with Diebler, who served as his primary recruiter while playing his first three collegiate seasons at Hudson (Ohio) Western Reserve Academy. He said his relationship with Diebler has only strengthened since the 37-year-old was named Ohio State's head coach in March, who has stayed in constant communication with the high schooler and even made it a point to re-offer him a scholarship when he took over.

"I knew him as a man before I knew him as a coach," Bundalo told the Dispatch. "He Facetimed me after his most recent child was born (in July). Getting to share that moment with him literally the day after his son was born, it's crazy that guy cares about me like that, honestly.

"Him being my primary recruiter and getting the head coaching job, it was a super, super match-made-in-heaven moment in the fact that the guy who wanted me to come there and was pushing me and talking to me every day is now the guy who controls everything."

Aside from his love for Diebler off the court, Bundalo also sees himself as a great fit in the new head coach's fast-paced system on the hardwood, which he was able to see when he took in Ohio State's practice on Friday.

The five-star has been touted as a forward who can stretch the floor with his athletic 6-10 frame, a skill set that mirrors that of Ohio State's new big men, transfers Aaron Bradshaw (7-1) and Sean Stewart (6-9).

"That's what I take the most from: style of play and understanding the game, because ultimately I'm committing somewhere to play basketball and to have a place that feels like home," he said. "Ohio State has those things. They're definitely going to be one of those schools that comes down to my final few. If I can say one takeaway, it was the environment of Ohio State is different than a lot of other places I've been."

Bundalo's trip to Ohio State also offered him a chance to connect with some of the program's top alumni during the team's annual alumni dinner held on Friday, where he said he got to know former players such as legendary Buckeye guard Jerry Lucas and now-San Antonio Spurs forward Malaki Branham.

The high school senior was seen taking in pregame warmups alongside Branham during Ohio State's football game against Marshall on Saturday.

Bundalo's trip to Ohio State was a success, but by no means has he made a final decision on his recruitment. The Ohio native also has trips scheduled this fall to college basketball blue bloods North Carolina, Kentucky and Kansas, each of whom are within Bundalo's top eight list of schools.

But the five-star is getting closer to a decision — he would like to make one before his senior season begins — and the Buckeyes have seemingly made a significant impression on him.

"I'm from Ohio," he told the Dispatch. "I love this place, but I'm never going to make a decision based off of where I'm from and playing in my backyard. I am going for the best fit. I wouldn't put Ohio State in there just because they're in my backyard. I truly mean this when I say it: I think Ohio State is one of the best fits for me out of all the schools that I have lined up and that's the reason I put them in my top eight."