

NBA Summer League A Mixed Bag For Trio of Former Buckeyes



Three former Ohio State men's basketball players entered Las Vegas for the 2022 NBA Summer League on July 7, but only one finished the 10-day circuit without complication.

San Antonio Spurs guard Malaki Branham and New Orleans Pelicans forward E.J. Liddell received their first action with their respective NBA clubs, while then-Indiana Pacers guard Duane Washington Jr. returned to the Summer League after he earned a two-way contract with the Pacers off of his performance at last year's circuit. However, Branham was the only former Buckeye who saw the Summer League from start to finish, as Liddell sustained a torn ACL in the Pelicans' second contest while Washington was waived by the Pacers on Thursday.

Despite setbacks to Washington and Liddell, each former Buckeye saw action in multiple games. Here's a look at how each player fared in the 2022 NBA Summer League.

BRANHAM EMULATES FRESHMAN SEASON IN NBASL

Branham's first two games in Las Vegas were forgettable. He produced an inefficient 15 points and a team-worst -25 plus-minus in the Spurs' opener against the Cleveland Cavaliers before a 1-for-6 shooting performance in a one-point loss to the Golden State Warriors in the second contest.

But similar to his lone season with the Buckeyes, Branham quickly turned his play around in the second half of the 10-day stretch.

He led San Antonio with 20 points in its third matchup against the Houston Rockets, hitting 3-of-7 3-pointers in the process. He also swiped two steals and corralled six rebounds in the 97-84 loss, marking a turning point for the former Buckeye in Las Vegas. The Spurs registered another one-point loss in their next outing, this time to the Atlanta Hawks, but Branham was sturdy offensively once again. He sank 6-of-14 shot attempts for 14 points against the Hawks.

But, Branham saved his best performance for last. As first-round teammate Blake Wesley shot an abysmal 11.8 percent from the field, Branham willed San Antonio to its only victory of the Summer League — dropping a team-best 23 points while hitting five 3-pointers against the Memphis Grizzlies on Saturday. He scored 14 of his 23 points in the game's final 5:35 — including a stretch in which he drilled three consecutive 3-pointers.

BUCK3TS! 🏀

Back to back to back triples for @MalakiBranham #GoSpursGo
pic.twitter.com/5Knkq9D3ZX

— San Antonio Spurs (@spurs) July 16, 2022

Branham finished the NBA Summer League with averages of 15.0 points and 3.6 rebounds per game while shooting 42.6 percent from the field and 42.3 percent from 3. While he was solid overall for the Spurs during the five-game stretch, there were a few areas of concern from the small sample of games. Most notably, he finished the summer session with an assist-to-turnover ratio with 1.4 assists to 2.0 turnovers — inflated by five turnovers against the Rockets.

LIDDELL'S SUMMER LEAGUE CUT SHORT BY INJURY

Liddell's introduction to the NBA Summer League was marred quickly by a long-term knee injury in just his second game at the next level.

His first outing was unmemorable as the Pelicans were blown out by the Portland Trail Blazers 85-68 and he was held to just two points on 1-of-6 shooting. He also struggled to make an impact on the defensive end, tallying a block but also picking up four fouls.

🏀 @EasyE2432 scores his first NBA Summer League points with a jam 🏀 #DevelopedHere
pic.twitter.com/j8baLGpmws

— 🏀™ Ohio State Hoops (@OhioStateHoops) July 10, 2022

In the second game of the circuit, he got off to a hot start — hitting his first three shots against the Hawks. But Liddell injured his knee after drawing contact in midair on a fastbreak alley-oop attempt with 7:57 to go in the second quarter. However, he returned to the floor later in the period and appeared to be at full strength until disaster struck. With 6:52 remaining in the third quarter, Liddell's leg buckled underneath him while he battled in the post with Hawks big man Marcus Georges-Hunt, which held him out for the rest of the game.

The Pelicans confirmed that Liddell had suffered a torn ACL in his right knee on July 12.

In 37 minutes of action, Liddell totaled eight points, eight rebounds and two assists behind a shooting percentage of 44.4 percent.

WASHINGTON WAIVED BY INDIANA

Washington made his return to the NBA Summer League, where he played himself into a two-way contract with the Pacers a year ago, but things did not go according to plan for the second-year guard.

Appearing in three games, Washington scored in double figures just once while shooting a dicey 34.6 percent from the field and 22.2 percent from beyond the arc. After starting in the Pacers' first game of the circuit, Washington was relegated to a bench role for the rest of his time in Las Vegas.

The former Buckeye was waived by the Pacers on Thursday in order to create cap space to extend an offer sheet to restricted free agent center Deandre Ayton. The Pacers ultimately ended up empty-handed in the Ayton sweepstakes as the Phoenix Suns matched the offer sheet on the same day.

Washington cleared waivers on Sunday and is now a free agent. He averaged 9.9 points per game as a rookie with shooting splits of 40.5 percent from the field and 37.7 percent from 3-point range.