

# No. 7 Ohio State Excited To Get Season Rolling With Non-Conference Matchup Against No. 21 USC In Las Vegas



After last season's run to the Elite Eight, the Ohio State women's basketball team has their sights set on championship contention, and that road begins on Monday. The seventh-ranked Buckeyes will open their season with a non-conference and neutral site matchup against No. 21 USC in Las Vegas' T-Mobile Arena, and Ohio State is excited to get things started.

"I'm excited," fifth-year guard Jacy Sheldon said. "I think we're ready. I think we've been doing a lot of competing against each other, and getting to go out and compete together against another team is going to be good for us and really fun, so we're excited."

Ohio State returns Sheldon, who decided to come back for a fifth season, as well as standout sophomore forward Cotie McMahan, junior guard Taylor Thierry and fifth-year senior forwards Rebeka Mikulášiková and Eboni Walker. The Buckeyes also worked hard in the transfer portal this offseason, bringing in fifth-year guard Celeste Taylor, the reigning ACC Defensive Player of the Year, from Duke and forward Taiyier Parks from Michigan State.

It's the 11th season at the helm for head coach Kevin McGuff, who has high expectations for his team as it seeks just the second Final Four appearance in program history, though he is first looking for a strong start against the Trojans, who finished 21-10 last season with a first-round exit in the NCAA Tournament in just the second season under head coach Lindsay Gottlieb, a former assistant with the Cleveland Cavaliers.

But USC lost three of last year's top-five leading scorers, including guards Destiny Littleton and Okako Adika as well as forward Kadi Sissoko, with Adika and Sissoko both selected in the 2023 WNBA Draft. Looking for some help, USC went into the transfer portal and grabbed forward Kaitlyn Davis, who averaged 13.6 points, 8.3 rebounds and 3.7 assists last season at Columbia, and brought in freshman guard JuJu Watkins, considered the best prospect nationally among the incoming group of freshmen.

Along with the new additions, the Trojans also return junior forward Rayah Marshall, who averaged a double-double last season with 12.7 points and 11.5 rebounds per game, and guard Kayla Williams, who

had 5.2 points, 2.4 rebounds and 2.4 assists a season ago.

“(Marshall)’s really, really talented, and a great athlete and good on both ends of the floor, too,” McGuff said. “Her presence will really be impactful for them. Hopefully we can throw a couple of different looks at her with a little more depth now and keep our post players a little more fresh.”

Like last season’s opener against a top-five Tennessee squad, this will be a game that can set the tone for Ohio State’s season. Several new pieces - not to mention the loss of sharpshooting guard Taylor Mikesell - could make for some early growing pains for the Buckeyes, but there will be no time to ease into things against a talented USC team.

“It’s just really hard to tell how good we are and where we’re at,” McGuff said. “I think this team could be really good at some point. I wouldn’t say we’re there yet, so we need a really good week of practice, because I know USC is very talented and well-coached.”

Ohio State’s season opener will tip off at 2 p.m., which the game set to be broadcast on TruTV.