

Ohio State Embraces Youth In Previous Two Games



While Ohio State has struggled to dig itself out of its nearly two-month-long rut, head coach Chris Holtmann has begun to embrace a youth movement in Columbus.

In Ohio State's last two games, which included a road trip to Mackey Arena to take on then-No. 3 Purdue and a home bout with Penn State, Holtmann has opted to start the Buckeyes' four contributing freshmen alongside redshirt senior Justice Sueing. While a season-ending injury to forward Zed Key accelerated the process of relying more on the freshmen, Holtmann noted while it's difficult for him to throw four first-year players into the fire, he's ultimately comfortable with those Buckeyes leading the charge.

"It could change from game to game, but those guys did a good job to start the Purdue game," Holtmann said prior to the loss to Penn State. "It's not an ideal setting to start four freshmen in that kind of environment, but I think those guys did a good job with it and got us off to a good start.

"I think they're gaining really valuable experience."

As Holtmann mentioned, the Buckeye freshmen aided Ohio State to an early 8-2 lead over the Boilermakers at a raucous Mackey Arena. The Buckeyes were boosted by an early pair of steals from Bruce Thornton on back-to-back possessions by the Boilermakers, while Brice Sensabaugh also tallied a layup during the stretch.

Purdue ultimately wrestled control of the game, pulling away to pick up an 82-55 victory over the Buckeyes on Sunday. While Holtmann's move to start the freshmen didn't result in a win, he was still encouraged by what he saw from the unit during the contest.

"Those guys have competed all year and played a lot of minutes at this point, but that's still a tough thing for those guys to do on the road against a top-three team in the country," Holtmann said. "They

helped our start be really good and minus some foul trouble, thought those guys did some really good things.”

Holtmann again opted to start the freshmen against Penn State, and it came with similar results. Sensabaugh and Thornton kept the Buckeyes in the game by combining to score 39 points against the Nittany Lions, while center Felix Okpara hit all four of his shots to tally eight points, but the contributions of the first-year Buckeyes weren't enough to push Ohio State to the finish line.

As Ohio State continues to limp toward the finish line, losing 14 of its last 15 games, Holtmann noted that the onus falls on the coaches to make sure the freshmen learn from this adverse stretch and apply those lessons moving forward in their college careers.

“As coaches, we have to do a great job at defining what wins and what loses in this league and in college basketball,” Holtmann said. “In the midst of these struggles right now, we have to imprint on their brains what wins and what loses. You can certainly take lessons with that in both outcomes, but I think that has to be imprinted on their minds and brains.

“The margin for error is typically pretty small, and I think, hopefully, that's the biggest thing that's coming out of this,” he continued. “If that's not being communicated, then all this is a waste.”