

Ohio State Forward Zed Key Sets Tone For Buckeyes On Emotional Senior Day



Ohio State's dominant Senior Day win over rival Michigan on Sunday was an emotional victory for many in the Buckeyes' program — one who has undergone a litany of change and adversity in the last month — and perhaps no one felt those emotions more than senior forward Zed Key.

The Bay Shore, New York, native, who has long been a fan-favorite due to his eccentric personality and "raise the roof" celebrations, has endured an up-and-down four-year career with the Buckeyes, one that has included everything from a career-defining performance against No. 1 Duke in 2021-22 to a season-ending shoulder injury his junior year that may have cost him his starting job this season. For Key, all those memories — both good and bad — came flowing back on Senior Day, leading to an emotional few hours for the big man.

"There were a lot of emotions today, even yesterday, just thinking about the game," Key said. Time has flown by so fast. I've been here for four years. I've been to every Senior Night, and you never think it is going to be you until it is you."

While a number of emotions may have been pouring out for Key just before tip-off, Key used those feelings to his benefit once he took the court. Making just his second start for Ohio State this season, the senior helped set the foundation for a blowout rivalry game win in the early minutes of the matchup, throwing down a thunderous tomahawk dunk over Wolverines center Will Tschetter on the second offensive possession of the game and making an instant impact with his activity on the glass.

"I really just took what the defense gave me at that point," Key said when describing the dunk. "They didn't rotate over (to guard me). So I can jump a little bit — a little bit. It was just a great play. It definitely did set the tone, like, 'Look, we're here. We're not going anywhere. We're a tough team.' "

"Zed's dunk certainly (set the tone), but also just how hard and active he played to start the game, I thought, was contagious," Diebler said. "It gave us a good boost to start the game."

Key's activity was infectious throughout the game. In what will likely be his final game at Value City Arena — he has one year of eligibility remaining due to the COVID-19-impacted 2019-20 season but has not indicated if he will use it — the longtime Buckeye finished with a crowded statline of nine points, three rebounds, two blocks and two steals.

While Key seemed satisfied with his Senior Day performance — as well as his entire Ohio State career — when speaking after the game he also acknowledged that there is still a lot left to accomplish this season, a season that could end with the Buckeyes earning a first-round bye in the Big Ten tournament if they can go on the road and defeat Rutgers on Sunday.

"I'm really grateful that I chose Ohio State for my college decision. I love the program, and we just have to keep it going, just keep rolling at this point."

For Diebler, it is this type of team-first mentality that makes Key a pillar of Ohio State's culture and program, a mentality that the coach said is an example of the vast improvements he has made on and off the court since both he and former head coach Chris Holtmann recruited him in 2019.

"I love Zed," Diebler said. "Zed's a great — he's not kid, I almost said kid — he's a great young man. He's the type of guy that you love having over to your house and being around your family. He's like a family favorite. The thing about Zed that I'm most proud of is he showed some real growth since he got here, maybe even moreso off the court, which is ultimately what this is about.

"So I love Zed. His family is awesome. The support they provide for him by coming to so many games (is awesome). We got to build a relationship (with Key) through recruiting. And then to coach him, he's a special young man."