

Ohio State Head Coach Chris Holtmann Discusses Jimmy Sotos' Season-Ending Surgery, Showdown At Iowa



The No. 7 Ohio State men's basketball team is riding a three-game winning streak into the home of No. 8 Iowa, which dropped two in a row before beating Michigan State Feb. 2.

Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann spoke to members of the media Feb. 3, breaking the news that guard Jimmy Sotos' shoulder injury will require season-ending surgery and previewing the showdown with Fran McCaffrey's eighth-ranked Hawkeyes. What follows is a rundown paraphrasing what Holtmann said:

Opening Statement:

Jimmy Sotos will need season-ending surgery on his shoulder. He will still be with the team.

Iowa is tremendous. Fran McCaffrey has a tremendous team, they are historically good offensively. And maybe the best offensive team I've ever coached against.

Challenges of defending Luka Garza?

You're not going to completely neutralize him. He's just too good, and they do too good of a job at getting him the ball in positions. He's got the best motor I've seen in a big guy in a long time. I'm sure there are others, reminds me of Tyler Hansborough's motor.

Facing other Big Ten bigs prepare you for Luka Garza?

He's different. And they're different. Jack Nunge is big off the bench for them. They're not just big with Garza, but so is Nunge and Joe Wieskamp has length. There is not a team in our league that plays like them.

Facing Iowa's size?

I would love to have Ibrahima Diallo (MCL injury) available. Just to have another big with size and length around the rim. We're going to have to be aware of not fouling and try to avoid foul trouble.

Iowa's zone defense?

It's a part of what they do, so I think it will continue to be a part of what they do.

Offense against Iowa?

We're going to have to be good at how we attack their man coverage and their zone. We have to be decisive, you don't want to be tentative. You have to play aggressive and play with force.

E.J. Liddell's success against Luka Garza last year as a freshman?

I just want him to be E.J. He gave us a lift there against them last year. Keeping him on the floor, keeping him out of foul trouble. And they rotate a lot of bodies, so depth is going to be important for us.

Comfortable with offense without Jimmy Sotos returning?

Comfortable. Our turnovers have gone up a little bit in league play. We've got to get better with that. It's good to have C.J. Walker back because he's typically a guy that handles it really well. I like our rotation of guards.

Jimmy Sotos?

It was disappointing. He was emotional after the Rutgers game when it happened. I think he knew at that point that it could be over, but we were trying to factor in every possibility. The sixth-month recovery also factors in.

Justin Ahrens?

Justin's been great. He's done a great job for us. He has a great offseason. He had as good of an offseason as I've seen. He just continues to grow as a player.

The biggest thing for us right now is us getting better and improving every day. This is the most challenging closing stretch of a schedule that I've been a part of. Every team that we play is a top-10 team or a tournament team or a bubble team, it's really tough.

Concerns about lack of size overblown?

I'd like to wait until we get through this stretch just to make sure that it's not as big of a factor as it seemed to be. And I realized the concerns coming into the season after losing Kaleb Wesson and his size and rebounding. I think we have really used our mobility and versatility to our advantage in those positions.

How good is Luka Garza?

He's the best collection of offensive skill and physicality that I've ever coached against. His motor is unparalleled. It's really Tyler Handborough-like with his motor and his physicality. He's a fantastic talent.

Kaleb Wesson's jump from freshman to sophomore year?

Kaleb's growth between his freshman and sophomore year really allowed him to have a great sophomore year, and it allowed us to beat some people early in the year and make the tournament when we weren't picked to do so.

E.J. Liddell's jump from freshman to sophomore year compared to Kaleb Wesson's?

There has been a similar jump. Kaleb had a really good offseason; E.J. had an outstanding jump. E.J. has more bodies around him, a better-constructed roster.

He's got to get better as a passer. He's had some trouble out of double teams. The hardest thing for him is his size getting trapped.

Overall impressions on Justice Sueing?

He's really bright and understood the transition was going to be a challenging one. But he's a really willing learner and hungry to get better.

Rewarding to see team's success through tough year?

It's been really rewarding. It's been a rewarding group to coach. Winning helps. But as we know with this league, you can play well and still lose. It's been a really rewarding group to coach, and what I've felt good about is that they've felt rewarded by winning some games. But they also understand it's a brutal closing stretch for us.

Michigan? Crowning a Big Ten championship?

I want to wait to talk about that more as we get closer. It's a conversation worth having once you get closer because of some of the schedule inequities. There are schedule inequities already, and if you're playing less games, then there are more schedule inequities.

Kyle Young?

The best ability is availability, He's obviously been banged up and gotten through some difficult times. I love him as a kid. I love him as a player. He's been so important to our program. It's hard to overstate how important it has been to have him. He brings great consistency and great buy-in. He's always bought in.

Jimmy Sotos injury?

Shoulder separation.

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