

Chris Holtmann, Jamison Battle Still See Great Potential In Team Despite Recent Slide



After a strong 12-2 start to the season that included quality wins over Alabama, UCLA and Minnesota, among others, the Ohio State men's basketball team has experienced a regression in the first two weeks of January, a trend that has become an all-too familiar situation for the program in recent years.

Plagued by poor second-half shooting, turnovers and an inability to hold onto late leads, the Buckeyes have dropped its last two Big Ten contests to drop its record to 12-4 and 2-3 in the Big Ten, first squandering a nine-point second-half lead on the road against Indiana on Saturday, then losing a four-point advantage in the final eight minutes of action Wednesday night against No. 15 Wisconsin.

Ohio State's early January slide draws similarities to its mid-season struggles last season, where, after a 10-3 start, the Buckeyes dropped two straight games in early January to No. 1 Purdue and Maryland, starting a stretch of 14 losses in 15 tries in Big Ten Play.

While the Buckeyes' poor start to 2024 is giving fans flashbacks of a bleak 2023 winter, head coach Chris Holtmann said he feels this team is more equipped this year to withstand adversity and emerge from the other side a better team with greener pastures ahead for the rest of conference play.

"I have a high-level belief in this team," Holtmann said after the Wisconsin loss. "I really do. And I'm being completely honest, I have a high-level belief in this team and what we're doing. Last year is last year. This is a different group. The leadership is different. And it's early in the season.

"I think that the challenge for us right now is to take this (loss) and learn from it and grow. We have to be tougher in certain areas, we have to be able to finish plays, but I really have a high-level belief in this group, and I can't emphasize that enough."

Holtmann's unwavering belief in his team has trickled down to his players, such as fifth-year forward Jamison Battle, who has emerged as one the Buckeyes' second-leading scorer this season at 15.2 points

per game in just his first year in the program.

The former Minnesota transfer said on Wednesday night that, despite the team's overall youth, he believes his team has enough experience and intangibles — starting with Battle himself — to steer the ship back in the right direction and turn the Buckeyes' close losses into close wins.

"I think so," Battle said after being asked if his team has enough experience to close out games. "The thing is, we're still learning and we're still growing. There are still a lot of young pieces on this team. And still, there are older guys on this team who have experience. And I think that's on me to show that experience.

"Regardless if I haven't won a lot of Big Ten games, I still feel like I played in a lot of meaningful ones. So for me, I'll take the responsibility in that aspect to where I have to be a leader. In the end, we have plenty of experience. And we just have to trust it. We have to understand that with that experiences, we've learned, we have scars, regardless of if I was here last year or not, there's plenty of experience on this team."

Regardless of the confidence the team still has in themselves, Battle said that he and his teammates still need to fine-tune their game if they want to have more consistency the rest of January. For him, this starts with the details, where he feels his team has been lacking over this difficult stretch.

"The biggest thing for us to close out games is to focus on little details," Battle said. "For someone who's been a fifth-year, and who understands that, I have to be more vocal about that. And I'll take the responsibility in that aspect. But that's the biggest thing, just honing in on those little details. Because in the end, those little details ultimately lead to big things. And that big thing is losing games.

"So if we focus on those details, whether it's boxing out, rebounding, being in position, stuff like that, where those little things are sured up. That's where games are won and games are lost."