

Ohio State Head Coach Jake Diebler Shares Approach Towards Finding Players Through Transfer Portal



Since its season-ending loss to Georgia in the NIT quarterfinals on March 26, the Ohio State men's basketball program has experienced its fair share of roster influx, as starting sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr., budding freshman guard Scotty Middleton and sophomore sharpshooter Bowen Hardman have all entered their names in the transfer portal in the last week.

With three key roster holes opening up — along with fifth-years Jamison Battle and Dale Bonner and likely senior Zed Key all departing the program this offseason — Ohio State head coach Jake Diebler and his staff will now need to look to the transfer portal to fill out the rest of their roster for 2024-25.

Appearing on 97.1 The Fan's "Rothman and Ice" Wednesday afternoon, the first-year head coach laid out his approach towards finding the right players who best fit the program through the transfer portal, saying he values adding talented players who can both embrace the fast-paced style they want to play with next season and be solely committed to helping the Buckeyes reach their top potential.

"Roster management is fluid," Diebler said. "It's a fluid thing, and it's going to be that way for a little bit of time. The beautiful thing about this program is it's going to attract really good players who want to win for Ohio State as (their highest) priority.

"So we're looking for that in the portal. We feel like we want to play (with) that pace. There's a skill and feel and things required to do that. We're going to be looking at that, too. But a lot of it is putting the pieces of the puzzle together, that's going to be changing."

While Diebler acknowledged that Ohio State is far from filling out its entire 2024-25 roster, it did add a key piece to that puzzle on April 2 when former South Carolina guard Meechie Johnson — who led the Gamecocks in scoring last year at 14.1 points per game — announced he is returning to the program

after two productive seasons in the SEC.

The Buckeyes are also in the mix to land another backcourt piece in former Princeton guard Matt Allocco who received an offer from Diebler and Ohio State on April 1 and averaged 12.7 points and 3.3 assists per game for the Tigers this season.

Ohio State may be eager to land some added depth in the backcourt through the portal, but for Diebler, the key to winning the offseason comes from player retention.

“We have to be monitoring (bringing in backcourt pieces transfer the portal),” Diebler said. “But for all of us, it’s about the pieces we know are here and want to chase a championship with us. We want to start there. Then, you can build around it from there.”

Diebler has consistently stressed the importance of returning his most productive players since he took over as full-time head coach on March 17, an effort that — outside of Gayle — he has been able to find success in.

Since their season-ending loss to the Bulldogs, the Buckeyes have since secured long-term commitments from sophomore guard and two-time captain Bruce Thornton, starting center and premier shot blocker Felix Okpara and budding freshman and potential 2024-25 starting forward Devin Royal. For Diebler, being able to retain these three players was key to getting this offseason on the right footing, a development that he said makes him excited for the potential of his squad next season.

“I’m really, really excited,” Diebler said. “Retention is a big part of this. You’re seeing that. That’s important for us. Then it’s time to fit things together after that.”

“We have big expectations for this program,” he added. “We’re attacking those head-on, and we’re not afraid of those. But there are no guarantees in this. I feel like we are off to a great start as far as building the team. I’m excited. I wish we could get to work tomorrow. That’s kind of where my mindset is. I’d love to get this team settled and get to work tomorrow so we can start building toward that... We’re really excited.”