

Ohio State Ready For Nonconference Tilt Against New Orleans, Not Overlooking Privateers Before Holiday Break



The Ohio State men's basketball team is nearing a nine-day break from games which will give them such much-needed time spend the holidays with their families and rest their bodies before the start of Big Ten play. Before that, however, the Buckeyes will play their penultimate nonconference game, where they will welcome mid-major New Orleans of the Southland Conference to Value City Arena on Thursday night.

Speaking with the media on Wednesday, Ohio State freshman guard Scotty Middleton said he and his teammates have possessed the same level of focus this week for the Privateers and are not overlooking their opponent before the long break. For Middleton, he instead sees this game as just another opportunity to continue adding to the win column and continue building upon this strong start to the season.

"We need to just finish the job," Middleton said. "We all came here to do our job and accomplish something that is bigger than ourselves. So it's just staying consistent. Even though we have a break coming up, we have to finish the job. We have a game tomorrow, so we need to ultimately get our job done."

New Orleans may not possess the same level of talent and aura as UCLA, but it does have some playmakers on its roster that have caught Middleton and the Buckeyes' attention. The Privateers offense — which enters Thursday's conference averaging 80.0 points per game on 43.2 percent shooting — is spearheaded by standout senior guard Jordan Johnson, who has emerged as one of the premier scorers in the Southland Conference this season in his second season with New Orleans.

The former Denver and Hinds Community College guard, who recently reached the 1,000-point plateau, leads the team in scoring at 23.1 points per game on 41.7 percent shooting, along with 37.5 percent shooting from beyond the arc and 88.0 percent from the free throw line. Joining Johnson in New

Orleans' backcourt is fellow senior guard Khaleb Wilson-Rouse, who is the only other Privateer to average double figures in scoring at 10.9 points per game, along with junior guard Jamond Vincent, who is third on the team in scoring at 8.0 points per game on 41.6 percent shooting.

Middleton said that while Johnson and his offensive counterparts will pose a stiff test for Ohio State's defense on Thursday, he feels his team will ultimately be fully prepared to meet this challenge and come away from this game on the winning side.

"They play hard, they are together," Middleton said. "But our game plan is to just stay together as us, play our game, defend, rebound, just get better."

While the talent gap between the two programs is significant and the Buckeyes are expected to come away with the victory, senior center Zed Key said he and his teammates have still attacked this week with the same level of attention and focus as any other week, a mentality that he says will help Ohio State emerge victorious before their extended break.

"New Orleans, they're a good team coming in to try and beat us," Key said. "So we have to be ready. We haven't overlooked them. We've been preparing for them the right way and the coaching staff even told us, 'Look, they were a really good team, and they're very capable of beating us.' So we're taking that to heart, and we're going to come ready and prepared tomorrow."