

# Ohio State Seeks Revenge Against Penn State In “Must-Win” Game



Coming off a difficult road loss to Michigan on Monday and a third-straight conference defeat, Ohio State is in desperate need of a bounce-back win, and that opportunity will come on Saturday afternoon when the Buckeyes welcome Penn State (9-9, 3-4) to Value City Arena. The Buckeyes, especially those who were on last year's roster, are well aware of the chance they have this weekend to break the losing streak and gain momentum into the final two weeks of January, a reality that forced sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr. to send a strong message to his team on Friday.

“It's extremely important to defend our home court, Gayle said. “I think it'd be an amazing turnaround for us to be able to get it rolling a little bit, especially in conference play. So this is a must-win game for us. I felt like we had a great opportunity to beat them at their place earlier in the season, so I think it'd be a great opportunity for us to get what's rightfully ours.”

Ohio State will look to win this “must-win” game against a Nittany Lions team that got the better of the Buckeyes in the two team's first meeting this season on Dec. 9, a matchup that saw Penn State overcome an 18-point deficit to defeat their Big Ten rivals 83-80 at the Bryce Jordan Center. While the Buckeyes will certainly be motivated to get their revenge over the Nittany Lions on Saturday, head coach Chris Holtmann knows it won't be an easy task to accomplish, as head coach Mike Rhoades' team is a talented group, one that is coming off an 87-83 upset victory over No. 11 Wisconsin on Tuesday.

“They're an athletic team, excellent guard play, but their interior guys are playing well,” Holtmann said. “They have good depth. So we are looking forward to the challenge against a group that plays a little bit of a different style. But like I said, they're playing well, a well-coached group, looking forward to the challenge.”

Penn State's strengths start in the backcourt with starting guards Kanye Clary and Ace Baldwin Jr., who are the team's only double-digit scorers this season at 19.1 and 13.2 points per game. The duo provides more than just a scoring threat, though, as they also average a combined 3.8 assists, 2.6 rebounds and

2.0 steals per contest.

Holtmann said Penn State's backcourt poses the biggest challenge with their ability to create pressure and havoc on defense, an area of their game that allowed them to force Wisconsin into 13 turnovers and total eight steals. Most of this defensive pressure comes from Baldwin Jr., who enters the contest leading the Big Ten with 2.9 swipes per game.

"We're going to have some turnovers tomorrow," Holtmann said. "I think what you're trying to do is limit the ones that are within our control. They are terrific with their hands. I mean, they added the A-10 Player of the Year (in Baldwin) who was the steals leader and assists leader, and it's translated. He's clearly got the ability. So we're going to figure out ways to mitigate it some, we're going to have some turnovers. But we're going to show them where they come from."

"Obviously they have a two-guard front that is really aggressive when it comes to steals," Gayle added. "We know Baldwin likes to back-tap a lot. He likes to be aggressive when he's playing defense. (We need to be) cautious when it comes to shooting gaps and playing passing lanes. We know that sometimes they may trap. So (we've been practicing) those types of game-like plays. I feel like our practice team and our scout and preparation provides a great look at that."

Holtmann didn't go as far as to say that Saturday's game is a "must-win," but he did say that his players are highly motivated to return to the win column and get revenge on the Nittany Lions with a convincing home victory, an opportunity the coach said will only happen if they come into the game with a focused mindset.

"They're kids, they're pretty resilient," Holtmann said. "But they also take losses hard. This group — as you want — takes losses hard. And it's our job as coaches to get them focused on what really matters. And that is putting in good work, problem solving and getting better."