

Ohio State Set For Second Chicago Trip, Will Take on UCLA on Saturday



Ohio State is set to travel to the Windy City for the second time this month, this time to take on UCLA as part of the CBS Sports Classic.

The Buckeyes defeated Illinois 77-67 earlier in the month and return to the United Center on Saturday to take on a Bruins team that is a far cry from your fathers UCLA program.

Steve Alford's squad is coming off of a 29-point loss to Cincinnati in the Queen City on Wednesday night and sits at 7-4 on the year with a two-point loss to Belmont preceding the defeat at the hands of the Bearcats. Despite UCLA's struggles, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said the Buckeyes will have to perform at a high level in order to come away with a win.

"They have played some really good competition here their last few games and they have played a tremendous schedule," Holtmann said. "There is a reason why they were top-20 preseason and I anticipate they will be back at some point in the top-25. They have just played a really challenging schedule."

Outside of losses to Belmont and Cincinnati, UCLA has only fallen twice; against Michigan State and Kentucky, both of which are still ranked in the top-20.

The Bruins figure to provide a significant challenge in terms of their size, as UCLA's length rivals that of Syracuse, which handed Ohio State its lone loss of the season on Nov. 28. In order to combat UCLA's size, Holtmann said the Buckeyes will have to play an intelligent brand of basketball.

"You have to play smart in terms of challenging them. You have to be able to play with a little bit of pace to where their size isn't as much of a factor," he said. "You have to be aware of it to a point, not where you're passive, but you're aware they can change shots."

The Bruins are led by sophomore guard Kris Wilkes, who is averaging 17.7 points per game. Wilkes, an Indianapolis native, was recruited by Holtmann when the current Buckeye coach was at Butler. Holtmann said he has always been impressed with Wilkes, who he said will be a difficult guard.

"Kris is a guy who has really developed and grown. To his credit and to UCLA's credit, he has really

grown in Steve's system and gotten better and better," Holtmann said. "He was a fantastic player in high school. We recruited him. Tremendous kid, great family. He is one of the best players in the country."

Coming off of two losses and with a superstar-caliber player, Holtmann said he expects UCLA to play well and hopes his team will be ready to match the Bruins intensity.

"They have had some really good moments and we are going to need to play really well," he said. We are going to face a really hungry team and we better be ready for that."