

Projecting Ohio State's 2022-23 Lineup With Justice Sueing: Centers



Ohio State fifth-year senior winger Justice Sueing is returning to Ohio State after missing all but two games in the 2021-22 season. He announced his decision to come back to college basketball on April 6, and his intention to do so at OSU on April 7, so the Cal transfer can now officially be factored in projections of Ohio State 2022-23 roster.

A 10.7 PPG scorer on 49.1 percent shooting who added 5.5 rebounds per contest in 2020-21, Sueing provides a huge spark to an Ohio State lineup losing seven players to graduation, the NBA draft, or transfer and could prove even more important if freshman point guard Malaki Branham sticks in the draft as currently anticipated. But as it stands in early April, who will be lining up around the veteran leader of head coach Chris Holtmann's sixth roster in Columbus?

Previous: Point guards, shooting guards, small forwards, power forwards

C: *Zed Key (Jr., 7.8 PPG, 5.6 RPG, 0.5 assists in 2021-22); Felix Okpara (Fr., No. 50 overall prospect in 2022)*

Ohio State has poked around the transfer portal for a big man, but it seems that the Buckeyes are most likely to enter this season with Zed Key running the show at center, trailed by freshman Felix Okpara.

That'll work. Key started 23 games last season and averaged 19.8 minutes per game. His fitness level is still a work in progress - he struggled with injuries down the stretch and was tough to keep on the floor at times. That's going to be the top focus for the Buckeyes this offseason, especially with Joey Brunk and Kyle Young departing. Unless Ohio State does nab a transfer, Key and Okpara are just about the only realistic options at center on this team. Okpara is expected to contribute from day one, but Ohio State needs to be able to rely on Key for 25-30 minutes per game.

The good news is twofold. Firstly, Ohio State does have an offseason to work on that. Key made a big

step from year one to year two physically, and can absolutely make a similar leap this offseason.

Second, the roster around Key should fit him pretty well. He won't likely be asked to do a ton that he's not comfortable with. Ohio State is built to handle a pretty consistent flow of small-ball lineups with four-out and Key as the one man in the middle. That's a role that suits him well as a scorer and a rebounder, and one that he may ultimately thrive in as the new top dog down low. His ability to defend in the post is going to be a big question to address, but if Ohio State is having serious issues with that, it does have a 6-11 freshman who made his name as a rim protector.

Deploying those two appropriately is going to be the biggest challenge for this position. Key and Okpara have tremendously different skill sets, and while both are valuable, their use cases don't have a ton of overlap. Key can't be used only as a scorer just like Okpara can't be used only in rim-protecting, but leaning into those strengths - especially early on - could be important for easing them into these larger roles than they're accustomed to.