

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



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?

SG: *Tanner Holden (5th-Sr., 20.1 PPG, 7.1 RPG, 2.6 APG in 21-22 at Wright State); Roddy Gayle (Fr., No. 59 overall prospect, No. 4 SG)*

The dust seems to be settled at shooting guard. Ohio State has made its lone portal moves of the offseason thus far in this spot, grabbing fifth-year senior Tanner Holden after a monstrous season at Wright State while losing senior sharpshooter Justin Ahrens to the portal only a few days later.

Ahrens only started about half of the 2021 season, ceding his spot to Branham down the stretch as the Buckeyes worked essentially with two point guards in Branham and Jamari Wheeler, but the former is projected to depart and the latter is absolutely departing. Unless Holden's transition to the Big Ten from the Horizon League goes disastrously, he can be plugged right into what was once Ahrens' starting spot at shooting guard.

That move comes with plenty of upside, but also with its fair share of question marks. Holden was a tremendous scoring threat for the Raiders, shooting 49.7 percent from the field while getting to the free throw line nearly eight times per game (7.8 attempts per game, 78.9 percent shooter) but he wasn't much of a 3-point shooter. He attempted just 1.1 deep tries per game and knocked down 34.1 percent.

Again assuming Branham departs, Ohio State is losing seven of its eight most prolific deep shooters in Jimmy Sotos (60.0 percent), Cedric Russell (43.3 percent), Branham (41.6 percent), Wheeler (38.8 percent), E.J. Liddell (37.4 percent), Ahrens (35.4 percent) and Kyle Young (29.4 percent) who

accounted for 565 of Ohio State's 688 tries last season (82.1 percent). Point guard Meechie Johnson Jr. was a 32.1 percent shooter on 3.2 tries per game, but Eugene Brown III (22.9 percent, 1.3 attempts per game) is the only other returner on the team to make a 3-pointer in 2021-22.

Granted, Sueing was a capable 3-point shooter in 2020-21 (36.1 percent on 2.0 attempts per game) and took just four shots this past season, but there's no high-volume shooter on the team as it's currently constructed with a proven ability to hit those shots. And the Buckeyes were already 131st in 3-pointers made per game last season.

That's not necessarily an issue. Holden and Sueing are, generally speaking, similar scorers - but that's not a death knell. It just means that the Buckeyes may need to get creative in their schemes to spread defenses out without an obvious threat on the outside.

The *real* concern with Holden is on the other end of the court, though. Despite a 6-6 frame, he was an actively harmful defender for Wright State in 2021-22 with a -0.9 defensive box plus-minus. That would have been the second-worst among all contributing Buckeyes last season, ahead only of Russell (-1.0). Now, Russell had a -2.4 DBPM in his final season with Louisiana before jumping to Ohio State, so it's not impossible to expect improvement when a player leaps from leading a mid-major into playing more of a role in the Big Ten. That doesn't make Holden's defensive history any less of a concern, though.

Perhaps freshman Roddy Gayle can alleviate both of those concerns off the bench. A top 60 player out of Mount Pleasant (Utah) Wasatch Academy, Gayle brings elite athletic ability and length (6-4), a high defensive ceiling, and about 18 points per game as a senior.

"Gayle has a college-ready body with good length (long arms) and great strength," Jerry Meyer of 247Sports wrote of Gayle. "He's a powerful athlete who thrives in traffic, handles contact extremely well and loves to dish it. He shoots the ball well off the catch with an efficient and smooth low release, and can also score at the rim. Most notably, he has a niche as a potent post-up player. Gayle also has the potential to be a formidable and versatile defender."

How ready he will be to contribute defensively or as a shooter in Columbus won't reveal itself until he takes the floor, but of the members of this highly touted class, he, forward Brice Sensabaugh and point guard Bruce Thornton seem to be the consensus picks for most likely to contribute from day one. As covered in the last look ahead, and as will be covered in the next one, all three will need to do just that.

Previous: Point guards

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