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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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Reason To Celebrate

Ohio State's Athletic Department Is Cementing Its Spot At The Top

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

In competition and in the classroom, Ohio State had a stellar year athletically in 2016-17. There's nothing new about that.

The Buckeye football team stole headlines in the first half of the academic year, and the changing of the guard with the men's basketball program provided a bookend for the year, but there was a lot more that happened in the world of Ohio State athletics. The Buckeyes wrapped up the year with a second straight second-place finish in the Directors' Cup.

Ohio State welcomed back Olympic gold medal wrestler Kyle Snyder, who went on to win an individual national title, while the men's volleyball team hosted the national championship and won it all for the second year running. The synchronized swimming team won yet another national title, and the men's lacrosse team made it to the NCAA championship game for the first time in program history.

In the classroom, Ohio State athletes were successful as well, with record numbers of academic All-Big Ten honorees and OSU scholar-athletes honored.

Leading the charge from the top was athletic director Gene Smith, who sat down with BSB on June 15 to discuss Ohio State's athletic success, future plans for the department, the men's basketball coaching change and more.

BSB: Looking back at the 2016-17 academic year, how would you rate the state of Ohio State's athletic department?

Smith: "It was a great year. Our coaches and student-athletes did a marvelous job again. We ended up with an average GPA of 3.2, that's out of 1,089 athletes. Forty-five percent were resident athletes and 55 percent were not resident athletes. We had 291 minority athletes. It was just a good, good performance academically.

"Then we finished second in the Directors' Cup again, just found that out this week, two years in a row. They just per-

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TIM MOODY

CONSISTENT PERFORMANCE – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith oversaw a second straight second-place finish in the Directors' Cup in 2016-17.

formed extremely well, and I think we're like 140-some points away from catching Stanford, which is the goal. They've won it every year except one year since 1994. Great performances by our teams, three national championships and four teams were runners up. I'm really proud of them. Just an outstanding year from that perspective.

"Our donors were phenomenal. We were able to finish off our fund-raising campaign for the Schumaker and Covelli facilities, started construction on those already. So it was a good year from a lot of different perspectives.

"Anytime you have a gold medal winner coming back is really kind of cool. To host the national championship for men's volleyball and win it, it doesn't get any better than that. To have your lacrosse team work so hard, (head coach Nick Myers) has done a marvelous job of working the blueprint over the years that we talked about when he was hired nine years ago, and the culture of that team is just phenomenal. To be there in the hunt with the blue bloods of lacrosse is just really special – and to know that you can get back, because there's a lot of talent coming back.

"So as I go through kind of each sport I get excited. Wrestling is going to be – the national championship next year is in Cleveland. That's going to be cool. Not in our back yard, but kind of in our back yard. We'll claim it. Men's

gymnastics, they'll be really talented again. We've just got a good group of coaches, best I've ever worked with, that have their individual blueprints and they're working on them, and Buckeye Nation has given us the resources to help those coaches do what they do."

BSB: Wrestler Kyle Snyder and women's tennis player Francesca Di Lorenzo were the Ohio State athletes of the year. What was it like to see the success they had both for Ohio State and worldwide?

Smith: "Kyle, I mean, I don't know what you say. That guy is like top of the pyramid. He is setting a new standard for us as far as elite athlete. He's just special. He's a 3.8 student, smart guy, really smart, and just a grinder competitively. So to have him here inspires a lot of people. It inspires our wrestlers in the wrestling room, but it inspires a lot of our other athletes. We have a culture where our athletes go and support each other, they go to different matches or events that they're not competing in and to see them at a wrestling match cheering him on and Nate (Tomasello) and those guys is really cool. Having him around is really good.

"And then Francesca, right here from New Albany, she is a fireball. She's really competitive. I was blessed to have



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Adding WiFi Could Be Next Ohio Stadium Project

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time to go down to Athens and watch them compete in the Final Four, and she dusted off her competition pretty good there in the doubles with Miho (Kowase) and she's just a special young lady, talented academically, another grinder. We have to force her to stop practicing. I remember a conversation with her coach after the national championship, somebody asked her, 'How much time are you going to take?' She said, 'Maybe two days and I'll get right back after it.'

"Having those elite type athletes around inspires everybody. You want to work hard for them, you want to make sure they have what they need to be the best that they can be. And we have that across the board, but those are definitely our two elite ones and there was a lot of others that competed for that opportunity. Christy Blough, men's volleyball, won the Elite 90 award. A lot of good ones, but those two kind of rose, they emerged."

BSB: The men's volleyball team has won two straight national titles in a West Coast-dominated sport. What has watching their progress been like?

Smith: "It's so cool. That's stability. Stability and providing necessary resources for (head coach) Pete Hanson. He's been here since '80-something, '86 or somewhere in there. For him, to have the resources so he can recruit nationally or internationally, which is what he's doing more now, you've got somebody like (Nicolas Szerszen) so he can compete recruiting wise internationally is critical. But the other part is the academic performance of our institution has risen over time."

"We're recruiting top of the tier students, and in volleyball there's a lot of them. So that combination has allowed him to compete against the best to get the best, and so I'm happy for him. There will be a little transition next year, lost a lot of guys, but we've got some good ones coming back."

BSB: Since you mentioned Covelli, what's the timeline for that project?

Smith: "They've started construction, so probably somewhere in mid-2019 it will be done. Schumaker about the same time frame. We could get lucky and get done earlier, but probably mid-2019."

BSB: What other facilities projects do you have in mind?

Smith: "We're doing two studies right now. We're going to hire someone for an indoor tennis facility. It's currently off-site, so we're thinking about bringing that back on campus, and then an ice hockey facility. We're looking at two sheets of ice, 4,000 seats, don't know if we can pull it off. We're going to see. The long-range plan is to eventually vacate the site where St. John, French Field House and the ice rink is and that would become available for academic use. So we're looking to see how much those cost and see if it's even feasible for us to fund raise because we have to fund raise for all of our facilities."

BSB: Switching gears to Ohio Stadium, how did the first season of alcohol sales at football games go?

Smith: "We didn't have any behavioral issues that people would think. Actually our numbers were down on behavior issues, and I really think it's because there was less binge drinking just before you go in because you don't have to slam a couple anymore just before you go inside. So I think that was one of the contributing factors, but we didn't have any real issues and the revenue gener-

ated went to public safety. We were able to fund six police officers for them, and over time we'll continue to look at how do we contribute to the environment to make sure we have a safe campus, whether that be more people or whether that be dogs or devices or things of that nature. Our commitment is to use that money to help the safety of our community."

BSB: Is there a plan to implement WiFi at the stadium?

Smith: "We're trying to see if we can get that done. There's so many things. A few years ago we put in a digital antennae system and that helps with texts and phone calls, but we don't have good WiFi throughout the stadium. We have it in certain spots – the press area, the suites – but in order to try some of the new ideas for our fan engagement we just have too many WiFi issues, so we're looking at that. We'll be taking it back to the board in July for consideration, and we'll see from there. But yes, definitely, that's the next big thing."

BSB: What would that entail?

Smith: "It's really just a big wiring job, literally determining points throughout the stadium where you would put antennas to make sure you have coverage. So it could be underneath a seat, where they drill up through the cement and place an antenna, might be on a hand rail. The hand rails in the aisles, there might be an antenna hanging from some spots – so strategically as you get 1669 antennae that they put throughout the stadium – and it's an expensive venture."

"So it's something that I feel we need to do for us to be able to be in line to provide our fans what's in play now with some apps and then what's coming. Our concessionaires are very much a part of this. We haven't moved to mobile ordering yet, but one day we might. In certain sections where you can just pull up an app, order your food and go pick it up or have it delivered. A lot of stadiums do that right now. We can't even try that because we don't have the WiFi. So it's hard for people."

"There's an app now if you follow four teams or six teams those games are on, you can pull it up while you're at the game and watch. You can do it in spots, but not throughout, so I want to make sure that we make the 'Shoe as comfortable as we can so we don't get to the point where someone says, 'Well I'm just going to stay at home on the couch because I want to see that game.' You can see it at the 'Shoe, and that's what we'll get to."

BSB: Looking back at the 2016 football season with the way it ended in mind, how do you judge that campaign as a whole?

Smith: "It was still an outstanding season. We want to win it all, there's no doubt, but we put ourselves in position and that's what's so important. We didn't perform at the level we should have performed over in Happy Valley (against Penn State), we know that. That took away an opportunity for a championship performance in Indianapolis, so we know that and we learned from that."

"But still, we had a pretty successful year. You got into the College Football Playoff so you gave your kids a chance, and we had some weaknesses. They were exposed by Clemson, they did a good job of that. But still, I would deem it a very successful season because we won significantly more games than we lost, and when you go through those challenges, hopefully it makes you better for the future. And I think Urban (Meyer)

has done that. I think he's made some modifications, and I think we'll be much better executing next year. Whether or not we have enough talent, we'll see. I think our execution will be much better."

BSB: Was there a focus on getting NFL experience for the football coaching staff?

Smith: "I don't think Urban in our conversations went into it saying, 'I want to achieve that.' I think it happened based upon the guys that he was interested in. But that's a good point. That will help. I think it'll help with the guys who are trying to go pro. They can sit down and talk to a Greg Schiano or talk to Ryan Day and talk about, 'What's it like at the next level? What do I need to do to really do better in order to give myself a chance to get there?' So Ryan can sit and talk about that. I think it will be advantageous in certain spots."

BSB: After the way Kevin Wilson's career at Indiana ended, what made you comfortable enough to have him join Meyer's staff here at Ohio State?

Smith: "A couple things. Urban did a great job of background checks, calling his contacts. I did the same thing. But more importantly I sat down and he and I had a conversation and looked one another in the eye, and he shared with me from his perspective what occurred there and then I talked about how it goes here. We have a way we operate and I have an expectation of accountability and how we operate. And so we had a great conversation in my office, I felt comfortable and that was good."

BSB: Are you comfortable with the amount of national recruiting done by Urban Meyer or would you want more of a focus on in-state recruits?

Smith: "He and I talk about that a lot, there's a balance there. We need to make sure that we get the best and the brightest out of Ohio. So that's still our focus. It never changes."

"But we're a national institution, we really are – actually an international institution. So we need to understand that, we need to recruit that way, not just in football but in all sports. And so the best and the brightest in Ohio and the contiguous states, we want to get after hard. They should be here. But we also recognize that we have people in different parts of this country who want to compete here, who want to get an education here, so we need to get out there. But we cannot neglect our back yard."

"So he and I talk about that a lot. 'Let's make sure we're working with our high school coaches, let's make sure they're engaged, let's make sure we're not missing someone or something.' Probably more than anything is the thing that's challenging is that developmental Ohio player. We don't get as many of those as we used to get because we get so much talent nationally."

BSB: Shifting focus to the basketball program, what was the process of deciding to make a head coaching change and let Thad Matta go?

Smith: "It kind of happened organically. When Thad and I were sitting in my office and we were kind of talking about the goals and objectives that he and I had agreed upon at the end of the season and where we're going and I realized we weren't getting there. I literally, because we're so close and I could just feel it, I said, 'Thad, maybe it's

time to make a change.' And he paused and he looked at me and said, 'You're probably right.' And because of our closeness we just kind of moved into, 'OK, let's talk about it.'

"We just kind of moved into the conversation, and I just knew it was right. We weren't moving in the right direction with recruiting particularly, and I just felt like it was time. And so we began that process, had the conversation, had the plan for the position. We decided we wanted to do the press conference on Monday as opposed to the very next day because of family and all those type of things. I wanted to be humanistic and sensitive to that. He deserved that more than anybody, and so we were able to make that happen. It was not easy for a guy that's given us so much and setting a standard for us in basketball."

"Some people tend to forget about what we were blessed to have with his leadership. It's phenomenal. And a guy in a tough, tough part of what we do. Basketball recruiting is hard, it really is. But I knew I could put my head on the pillow at night because I trusted him. He was always going to do it the right way like our coaches, and so that was not easy. It wasn't an easy thing."

BSB: What was the process of looking for a new coach and what led you to Chris Holtmann?

Smith: "That weekend I had Big Ten meetings in Chicago that I had to be at. We couldn't move and do anything until the press conference on Monday, I couldn't make a phone call. Otherwise it would have got out, what we were doing with Thad. And so I did a lot of behind the scenes work, developed a profile, studied the financials, came up with the financial parameters, talked to the president that weekend, got his approval to move."

"I called my good friend Eddie Fogler and got him engaged. Just kind of chat with me about my list, already created a list. You always need somebody that's in the business to kind of challenge you on your thoughts. So he was good with that. And then Monday after the press conference, he got on the phone, I got on the phone and we started."

"You've got to get background information on people that you're going after, you've got to be sure. I called my good friends in the basketball industry ... I've been doing this for 30 years so I have a lot of basketball people I know, being on the basketball committee. I called in confidence and asked about people and he did the same thing, and then late Monday night we reconnected with one another and Chris' name just kept popping up because of the profile."

"I was looking for a recruiter, I thought I was pretty clear with people that recruiting is big. We have to get back to what Thad did so excellently for a long time – you lock up this state and get into the contiguous states. But we've got to lock up this state. And so I was really, really pressing in my profile for a recruiter. You want a teacher, you want a person that's going to do it right compliance-wise, and that was another part of the vetting process that's really critical, particularly in basketball. So Chris' name just kept popping up, so that's when I called him Tuesday and said, 'Hey, you're my guy. Are you interested?' And I got why he wanted to take his time and – top recruiting class coming to Butler, they've done so much for



Thad Matta

THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: GENE SMITH

him there, highly successful. He's kind of a high IQ, emotional guy. He had that bond with Butler, and I got it.

"So he wanted time to think about it, but in the meantime I had to go and see other people, which I did. So on Tuesday night and Wednesday I was gone and seeing other people and still staying in contact with him, and me or Eddie was constantly calling him, trying to move him along.

"I had Thad call him. I said, 'Thad, call him and get him off the edge, man.' And then on Wednesday I moved the offer from seven to eight years, and then Wednesday night he said he would meet me Thursday morning so we developed our little drive to Dayton early Thursday morning.

"That was so funny. I think I had three hours of sleep. So we got up early and drove to Dayton and we met, with his wife. I asked him if he could bring his wife and I was going to bring mine. Sheila went with me and Lori showed up, and we sat probably, maybe an hour and a half to two hours and just chatted, get to know one another, understand the state of the program. Look each other in the eye, it's so important, and he accepted right there on the spot. I picked up the phone and called Eddie and said, 'Hey, call everybody else and cancel everything else. Got my guy. I'm done.'"

BSB: How important was it to have a guy who has been recruiting in this region already?

Smith: "Critical. You hit on it. That was what I was driving for. In my profile I had community engaged. I wanted somebody that's going to get out in the community, obviously someone that's highly motivated by academic performance which is so important here. I had all these profile elements – recruiting was right at the top of the list. So the next two years in Ohio, maybe three, some of the best talent in the country is right here. So we needed someone that had familiarity and connections in Ohio, which he did."

BSB: Do you think it was a unique situation to have a guy like Thad Matta who was willing to be involved in the transition process?

Smith: "Yes, probably unique. And unique for him to be at the press conference. That speaks to the integrity and class that he has as a human being, just an unbelievable person. But also talks about our relationship when we say there Friday and talked about how we would move forward and do this. There was never any question of him not being at the press conference. That was the right thing to do and he was there.

"He was more transparent about himself than I thought he would be. So he was there and then he and I talked on our meeting on Friday about – we talked names of potential candidates, talked about where he could help me. And he was on board. So we had a long conversation after we made that decision that it was time for a change.

"He's the best of the best, classy as all get-out. He set a standard for what you want to look for in a leader. He's just a good human being, and somewhere along the line we've got to pay tribute to what he did here and give him the proper due and somewhere down the line we'll do that. Great guy."

BSB: Now that Coach Holtmann is here and has his staff in place, what kind of relationship do you expect Coach Matta to have with the program?

Smith: "It's really on him. I don't know. He'll probably want to get away for a while and chill. It's totally open, so it'll be up to him. And Chris will have an open door for him. So I'm not sure what he'll want to do. Sometimes you know I've seen it so many

times where people of his stature and presence ... they want to separate themselves for a little while and then maybe come back. But it's open arms for us."

BSB: Switching gears back to football, how will the early signing period in college football affect Ohio State?

Smith: "I've grown to respect that it's here, we've got to deal with it and that's OK, it will work. It won't affect us a whole lot except that the kid that develops late, the Darron Lees of the world, you can miss. So we've got to be really, really careful. He was a late bloomer. His senior year was so important to be identified and go after.

"But now your numbers games kind of moves back even more. So you've just got to, it becomes a numbers game. How many are you going to sign early? Who's going to come here? Who's going to sign in February? So it changes things a little bit for that developmental guy in their senior year."

BSB: Do you think it's a net positive or negative for the recruits themselves?

Smith: "I think it will end up being a positive. My concern is a small number, it really is. (Wisconsin AD) Barry Alvarez and I had a great conversation about it. He was for it. Certain areas of our country, if a kid wants to go to Madison, Wis., he's going to Madison, Wis., and that's OK. So when you look at the numbers and I might have them wrong, I think it was like 62 or 63 percent of the kids that made their verbal commitments went to that school, they ended up going there. The numbers say they're going to sign in February given that opportunity. So I think in the end it'll be highly positive. I'm just worried about kids being missed."

BSB: What was it like watching the men's lacrosse team make a breakthrough this year?

Smith: "That was so cool. We were fortunate watching Nick, our men's lacrosse coach, just grow over the years and just get better and better and recruiting. Then we hosted the Big Ten championships. We almost won it here against Maryland, one of the blue bloods in lacrosse. I actually told the guys after that game here, 'You might see them again.' We had already beaten them and then they beat us in the championship game here. And then to go to Gillette (Stadium) and be in that facility and just see Nick's vision become a reality, 'Hey, we can

be there.' It validates everything that we've done to help lacrosse grow in this state. And then to be in the game and, God we were so close to winning it. It was so much fun. Those kids are the best – great kids from Canada, Ohio, Alabama, everywhere else. Great guys."

BSB: How big would it be for the women's basketball team to make a Final Four run in Columbus next year?

Smith: "Our young ladies know, they know it's here. They're working hard. That would really be cool to be in it. We're glad we were able to win the bid and bring the Final Four here to this community. I know our community will rally, it will sell out. (Women's coach) Kevin (McGuff) understands that he wants to be in it and our kids want to be in it so I'm sure they'll work hard to do it."

BSB: What does it say about Mike Conley that he played here for one year and now he's in the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame?

Smith: "It says a lot about that particular year. It was special and everybody knows it. He – Greg (Oden) was a difference maker, but Michael was clearly the difference maker which is why he ended up just elevated in the draft status during that run. Great guy. He built a house here so in the offseason he lives here, he's embedded in this community. That run meant a lot to the years after that where we were able to have some success. So I think Varsity O committee probably looked at that, not just that year but it kind of helped catapult our basketball program a little bit."

BSB: Do you expect Thad to be in that HOF some day?

Smith: "I don't know how they can not put him in there. He's the winningest coach in our history in basketball. The draft picks, the conference championships and the tournament championships. Two Final Fours. I mean, a lot of people just love that short résumé. I'd be shocked if someday he's not in."

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Holtmann Considering All Roster Options

By RYAN McGLADE
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State welcomed its 14th men's basketball head coach in program history when Chris Holtmann was officially hired June 9. Holtmann, who replaced Thad Matta after his 13-year tenure came to an end on June 5, was the head coach at Butler the last three seasons. His head-coaching career began at Gardner-Webb, where he was at the helm from 2010-13.

It has been a whirlwind for Holtmann since getting hired in June. He has had to juggle getting settled into his new position, developing relationships with the players currently on the team and recruiting, along with countless other tasks.

Despite the busy schedule, Holtmann found some time to discuss the aforementioned items as well as other topics such as the addition of 2017 Massillon (Ohio) Jackson forward Kyle Young, who was at one time a Butler signee, and the outlook for the program going forward.

How are you getting settled in Columbus?

Holtmann: "It's coming. Yes, it's coming. I felt really welcomed here by (Athletics Director) Gene (Smith) and by all of the people here. It's been great. I've had some good time meeting people and meeting a lot of the staff at the Schottenstein Center and some athletic department staff.

"You hit the ground running whenever you get a new job. You really hit the ground running when you get that job in June and when you're looking at potentially adding to your current roster in June and then also catching up with '18 and '19 classes."

What can you do with the current roster at this point in the year?

Holtmann: "I think be really selective. I think priority No. 1 is we want to be deliberate and prudent in our decision-makings when it comes to who we could potentially add. I think that we're thinner than probably anybody would like to be right now in terms of numbers. I think we all recognize that. I think we've got some outstanding kids and some really good players returning, but numbers are thin.

"How do you address that in June when everything has kind of been picked over? You may add more walk-ons than you typically would. I think that is something that we will probably do. Obviously, the addition of Kyle makes a lot of sense for us for a variety of reasons but also really helps.

"Then if there is another guard that we could add that would make sense, we're certainly considering that. Right now, you make a lot of calls and it's not the right fit – we don't feel like it's maybe the right fit – or guys have made their decision."

Have you thought about the junior college route?

Holtmann: "We've thought about it. We have thought about it. We've discussed everything from graduate transfers to junior college options at guard to transfers in general. But we certainly don't want to compromise on them being what we feel like are Ohio State guys, and we don't want to compromise on their talent or ability because that just handicaps you in the future.

"So because of that, I don't know that we'll add another one, but we'd like to. And if we feel like he can come in and play an important role and grow and help us not just

now but in the future, then we'll probably do that."

How hard is it to balance the current team with the 2018 and 2019 classes?

Holtmann: "It's hard. It's tempting probably to reach at this point. But I've been counseled by enough guys who have done this and reached and regretted it. I took over a different situation, but my first head-coaching job was massive in its scale of rebuild and all of that kind of stuff, so I learned something there. But I've talked to enough people who have reached and ended up regretting reaching.

"Whether it be because academically they weren't the right fit or they couldn't help them down the road compete at the level they wanted to compete at so that scholarship is tied up or the character piece. Unfortunately, in June, there are more of those issues that you have than you do at other times.

"I just think we're going to be really convicted in our belief that we just can't do that. If that means a third of our team, so to speak, is walk-ons, that might be the case. That might be the case."

Have you had much experience with the JUCO and graduate transfer routes in your time as a head coach?

Holtmann: "Yes, both. But at Butler, graduate transfers were really important for us. We got to the Sweet 16 because we recruited well last year, but part of that recruiting well was high school kids, a transfer who sat one (year) and played one (year) and then a graduate transfer from Memphis, Avery Woodson, who played a really important role for us. He was nearly a double-figure scorer. We went down that road, but basically all of those guys or most of those guys have made decisions at this point – graduate transfers."

Have you started to think about how to manage a roster where you have one experienced point guard (junior C.J. Jackson) and one other freshman point guard (Braxton Beverly)?

Holtmann: "I've tossed that around and have been discussing some ideas on what that would look like and what we could do and who we could potentially move there. I have looked at that. I think I realize, I think our guys realize that that's going to be the focal point of our team, that position. Just because we have, more than anything, some inexperience there.

"But I think I'm excited about the guys we have in that position, I really am, going through some workouts here. Obviously, C.J. and Braxton, I'm excited about those guys.

"Most guys would tell you they'd love to be able to have three point guards on their roster at all times – that was kind of Thad's deal as well. He wanted to have three point guards. I could anticipate that we will play J.T. (senior forward Jae'Sean Tate) there some for sure. To what capacity? I don't know. But he's going to play all over, right? He's going to play probably four positions at a time, but that will certainly be one of them I would think."

(Editor's note: Beverly was granted his release from the program on June 30.)

Have you spoken to JaQuan Lyle and is there any chance he could end up back with the program?

Holtmann: "I have not spoken with him.

I have not had that conversation. Gene and I have discussed our roster multiple times and different options, but at this point I don't anticipate that."

What is Derek Funderburk's status in regard to his suspension that was issued June 15, and what does he have to do to earn his way back if he's not there yet?

Holtmann: "As of today (June 23), it continues. I think the biggest thing that I want for him is, coming in as a coaching staff, I really want him to be successful. I really, really want him to be successful.

"He's talented but he has some work to do in some areas outside of basketball. He has some work to do. I'll let you guys kind of figure that out. Obviously, one of them is in the classroom. He has some definite work to do, and when we see progress in that area – significant progress – then we'll reevaluate things. But we need to see definite progress, and that's kind of our responsibility as well to his family.

"I spoke with his dad (Derek) last week and his dad was like, 'Coach, he's got to grow in some of these areas,' and that's what we're hoping to see here. I think he's really talented and those that know him know he's got a great work about him – he's got an outgoing personality. So I'm optimistic, but at this point we'll see."

(Editor's note: Funderburk was dismissed from the team on June 30.)

Whether the team names them or you do, will you have captains?

Holtmann: "We will. It's like at Butler, the guys that went out before games and shook the referees' hands, they kind of decided that on their own. That's great, that's kind of a ceremonial thing but it doesn't really impact winning at all. But I think we will probably name, 'Hey, these are the captains,' for sure."

Based on what you've said and what the previous staff said, it seems like Keita Bates-Diop and Jae'Sean are lining up for significant roles. Are those guys that you're leaning on a little bit?

Holtmann: "Yes, for sure. Those two guys have been outstanding, and they're going to be really important for us. Those two guys have been terrific."

What have you seen so far from Keita now that he's back from season-ending surgery on his leg?

Holtmann: "He's getting in shape, he's getting in better shape. This has been our first full week of skill workouts. Now, I've had a chance to go back and watch some game footage but it was more from last year and he wasn't playing much because he was injured. But I'm excited about him, excited about his approach right now.

"He's fresh and has just gotten back into workouts so his conditioning is impacted, but he's extremely coachable right now. I can see why people would look at him and say, 'Wow, he's really intriguing in terms of what he can eventually be.' Because you look at his frame (6-7, 235), his length and his versatility, and you say, 'Wow, that's a young man that, as he continues to grow, can really have an impact.'

"He's been great so far, and he's 100 percent cleared and healthy. He had a really, really good workout yesterday so you're

asking me on a good day. I thought he had a really good workout and he's getting in a little bit better shape.

"I spent some time with his mom (Wilma) when she came over last week. It was great to see her. I'm really excited about Keita."

You mentioned Kyle Young earlier. Can you take us through the process of him deciding to come to Ohio State?

Holtmann: "It really came down to Butler and Ohio State for Kyle. There were a ton of other schools, pretty much every other – you guys know the number of schools that really wanted him. I would sit down at events and he was the focal point for a lot of people this year. It really ended up coming down to these two places.

"Kyle's story is unique because he's had some personal tragedy, so I think the relationship that was formed over a couple years of recruiting him by (assistant coach) Ryan Pedon and myself at the end of the day was probably the deciding factor – even though I know this place had real pull for him initially.

"I did not speak with him after my initial phone call to him as I called all the players and told them I was leaving (Butler). I had no contact with him or his family – none whatsoever. I just told him that he needed to see this thing through with Butler, and then at that point if he decided that Butler was not the place for him then we can kind of go from there.

"I think it was unique because he's an hour and a half away, it was unique because of his personal story. Those things make this situation, but he really needed to drive the bus completely on that decision – he and his family completely on that decision. Then when we got the release, I called him that afternoon (June 19). You could tell, he was set in his mind probably pretty early on."

Given your head-coaching experience and what happened to the guy who had the job before you, what gives you the confidence you're going to have this eight-year contract and maybe another contract? What gives you the confidence that this is going to work?

Holtmann: "Overall, I believe in the way we do things. I believe in our philosophy and how we go about things – I have a strong belief in that. But listen, when you're at this level, you've got to prove it every day. We're not going to shy away from that. We have to prove this every single day, and that's what it's going to be about.

"As I spoke in my press conference (on June 12), it's going to be about doing today well. If you do enough of today's well, then tomorrow's will take care of itself. I really believe that. I think anyone who says that there won't be times of self-doubt, they're lying to you. Believe in the process and the plan we have in place, but eventually we're all going to have to prove that our plan is successful.

"I will tell you this, of all the opportunities that came my way, there was not one that appealed to me nearly to the degree that this one did. I never seriously considered one. My wife (Lori) knew when I got the call on Tuesday (June 6) that this one had some weight and gravity to it because I think The Ohio State University is really special. I think it's a really special place. If I was going to leave a special place, it needed to be to a really special place.

"I think for all of those reasons, we're going to have some challenges in front of us – I get that. We'll have some ups and downs and some rocky days, but I believe ultimate-



THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: CHRIS HOLTSMANN



TIM MOODY

HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING – After being hired in early June, Chris Holtmann had a busy first few weeks as Ohio State's head basketball coach.

ly that if we stay committed to what we're doing, good things will happen."

How much of a challenge will it be to prove the principles that you guys have that allowed you to be so successful at Butler in recruiting? How important is it to show that those can also be successful recruiting at this level?

Holtmann: "I see a lot of similarities. The waters that we were recruiting in those last couple years were pretty deep. The guys that we were getting could pretty much play anywhere in the country – a lot of places. I think most importantly we just don't want to get away from the kind of kid that we've recruited. And the kind of kids I observed here from a distance that I was like, 'Whoa, those are impressive people, they're impressive players, they're impressive in their approach.'"

"And it's not just the pros – we could rattle off all of the names – but you look at during Thad's tenure, which is the tenure that I probably followed the closest, there were obviously great players before, great coaches before, but that's the one I follow the most. And you say, 'Those are very similar to the kind of guys that I coached and recruited in the past. Hopefully we can continue to do that.'"

"The challenge is in front of us in '18 and '19, and there's no question about it. That's exciting and we're digging in. When you get the job in June it puts you a little bit behind. You have to reidentify the new relationship with recruits – particularly in the '18 class. That's the work ahead of us right now."

You have enough space to bring in five players for the 2018 class. You have said you may bring in three or four in '18. Why wouldn't you use all five?

Holtmann: "Good question. Very rarely will we have 13 players on scholarship. Say that 13 guys are eligible to play on scholarship ... it's too hard to keep that number happy (in terms of playing time). You can't do it. So it leads to turnover. You're going to have turnover anyway because it's the nature of the beast right now. So that might be why. There could be some unique circumstances that could lead to us using all of them."

"But I think once we feel really good about where we're at in recruiting and where our roster is numbers wise and once we feel like it's really healthy, we may not have more

than 10 or 11 players. You might have 10 that are eligible to play and then one who's a transfer that's sitting out. Having said that, early on we could end up using all of them and maybe potentially redshirting one. We have more flexibility here early because we need to have more flexibility."

Is adding another big-man a priority with just Kaleb Wesson and Micah Potter on the roster?

Holtmann: "I like our guys there at that position. I think that's good depth. You'd like to maybe have a third that could play both the power forward and the five spot that has some versatility. But I think Micah has some versatility there, too, so we will add definitely another."

"I don't know that it will be strictly a five in this class. Obviously, people look at our team and they say, 'Hey, the focal point is guards and wings.' And I get that, that is our focal point. Beyond that we'll add somebody on the frontline."

Did you have any ties to Ohio State going in?

Holtmann: "I was born in the state. I'm trying to think here. What could I tell you? Like a personal story that somebody from Columbus saved my life or something. More than anything, I've recruited this state for 20 years, so I've been through it a lot and I have an appreciation for, obviously, this university. I have an appreciation for this athletic department and what it's been able to do. I have great respect for, obviously, what (OSU football head coach) Urban (Meyer) has done."

"I think all of that combined with my just feel for the Midwest, my appreciation for the Midwest, for being in this state, for being at Ohio University and then following Thad's tenure here. I certainly didn't anticipate that I'd be sitting in this chair in June, but I've always thought it's a terrific place."

You brought your three assistants over from Butler with you. Will you be making any more changes to the support staff?

Holtmann: "We will be adding to the support staff. I think you guys know (director of basketball operations) David Egelhoff has been retained."

In the same position?

Holtmann: "Same position, yes. Thad called me and said, 'Whatever you do, keep David Egelhoff.' I said, 'OK, Thad. I'm going to listen to you and I'm going to do that.' He repeated it so I was like, 'No, Thad, I'm really going to do this. You made my decision for me.' I knew David a little bit. We knew his family a little bit."

"Then we'll figure out some things from there. There will be probably one or two additions to kind of the support staff. Obviously, we had a player development role (at Butler) and there might be another role that I add. Whether it's a special assistant to the head coach, it's going to be kind of a position to be named."

Did you guys have a strength coach at Butler?

Holtmann: "Yes, we did. Jim Peal did a great job. I will be bringing in a strength coach here. I've got great appreciation for Dave Richardson, Coach Richardson and what he's done – I've heard great things – but we'll be bringing in a strength coach here."

Gene Smith said the No. 1 item on

his list for when he was looking for a new coach was recruiting. When you look at your personal skill set, where would you rank recruiting?

Holtmann: "I feel like it's a collective effort. You have to have a staff that is really competent and good in that area. It's something that I enjoy, quite honestly. It's something I enjoy. I enjoy the challenge of it, the relationship building. I enjoy both the evaluation process of who you're adding to your program and how important that is. So I'll let others kind of evaluate how we do."

"Everywhere I've been relative to our league and our level, we've had good success in that area. Any coaching success or honors I've had have been because we've first been able to recruit effectively, and we all know how important that is."

You played in Puerto Rico and in the Bahamas when you were at Butler. Do you think that's something you'd like to get Ohio State involved in?

Holtmann: "Yes, it is. I would like to. The schedule was basically finished – a couple contracts coming in – before we arrived. So it's in place and I think it will be released maybe in the next month or so. I didn't have any flexibility over this year's schedule. But moving forward, I would like to do that. I think those tournaments are fun."

"Portland (vs. Gonzaga in the 2017 Phil Knight Invitational) will be a terrific challenge this year. That will be a lot of fun for our fan base. Buckeye Nation, I think, is going to enjoy that. Those are fun tournaments to be a part of, whether it's Maui or the Battle 4 Atlantis (in the Bahamas) or any of them."

"I think, and you'll see this and you can hold me to it, but I think if I'm going to err, it's going to be err on the side of it being more challenging than not challenging in the non-conference. I thought to myself last year that I might have made a mistake by doing it, but it ended up allowing us to have a four-seed in the NCAA Tournament, and it was all a byproduct really of the nonconference schedule."

"Hopefully, we can get to that point. I think that's important. Hopefully, we can have some games that will attract our fan base."

"One of the things I'm so excited about is the energy that has been in the Schottenstein Center during some of the games that I watch and during Thad's tenure was just incredible. I'm excited about getting to that."