

Sensabaugh Emerges As Late-Game Scoring Threat In Recent Stretch



With Ohio State's CBS Sports Classic battle against North Carolina knotted at 77 with 17.1 seconds remaining in regulation, Buckeye head coach Chris Holtmann opted to put the fate of the game in the hands of freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh.

Freshman guard Bruce Thornton initiated the action, finding Sensabaugh at the top of the key while the forward worked to free himself from the hounding defense of North Carolina guard Leaky Black. Sensabaugh then shook Black with a rip-through before driving left and placing Black on his hip. With 3.9 seconds remaining, Sensabaugh stopped on a dime and pump-faked, which caused Black to be a step behind the freshman forward, and rose up to drill an elbow jumper that lifted the Buckeyes ahead 79-77 with 2.0 seconds remaining in regulation.

It was the second time in as many games that Holtmann called Sensabaugh's number while looking for a go-ahead bucket. Despite playing in just 10 collegiate games at this point in his career, while leading the Buckeyes in scoring with 14.9 points per game, Holtmann said Sensabaugh's offensive feel is a driving factor in his confidence in the freshman to make game-changing shots.

"He's probably our best guy at creating his own shot and I think that's what you're looking for late in games," Holtmann said. "I've got tremendous confidence in his ability to do that. There will be a number of guys that we'll go to late, that we've identified, but he'll certainly be one of them."

Sensabaugh's go-ahead bucket against North Carolina would be for naught, however, and the Tar Heels responded with a buzzer-beating turnaround jumper from forward Pete Nance. North Carolina went on to win the game 89-84 in overtime, while Sensabaugh scored two of Ohio State's five points in the extra frame.

In the game prior to Ohio State's bout with North Carolina, the Buckeyes' Big Ten opener against Rutgers, Holtmann also placed the ball in Sensabaugh's hands with the objective of getting the go-

ahead bucket. As the Buckeyes trailed the Scarlet Knights 63-62 with 23.7 seconds to go, Sensabaugh was freed up by an off-ball screen from forward Justice Sueing, before catching the ball and posting up guard Caleb McConnell at the top of the key. Sensabaugh then drove left before putting up a layup attempt that was swatted away by Scarlet Knights center Clifford Omoruyi.

Although Sensabaugh's attempt against the Scarlet Knights was unsuccessful, the Buckeyes still snuck away with a win thanks to a deep game-winning three from Tanner Holden as time expired.

While Holtmann has relied on Sensabaugh's offensive ability at key junctures in back-to-back games, he also noted that his star freshman has been well-trained for the moment in practice.

"Most of all these scenarios, we have went over a number of times in practice," Holtmann said. "We're not guessing in those situations what we're going to do on either end. It's already been discussed in the offseason, it's already been planned on. There's rationale behind it."

Although Sensabaugh has gone 1-for-2 in these crunch-time scenarios, he has already shown growth when in the moment. Both of his late-game takes came off of a similar action, in which he receives an off-ball screen from Sueing before catching the ball at the top of the key, driving left and getting to his spot for a shot.

On his first attempt against Rutgers, Sensabaugh was a little too aggressive, driving hard to the block before Omoruyi sent his shot back. Against North Carolina, however, Sensabaugh adjusted to the defense — opting to stop on a dime and pull up for an elbow jumper rather than attack the basket, which helped him gain the necessary separation from Black and hit the go-ahead jumper.

"We talked about, maybe, an adjustment he could make from the Rutgers game off of a similar action," Holtmann said. "He did make an adjustment. We'll have to have different things we run, we're going to be in a lot of close games, I don't think we can run the same thing every time.

"You learn that by going through those scenarios in practice."

Although Sensabaugh has emerged as one of Ohio State's primary scoring options in crunch time, he said that he's still getting acclimated to competing against the tougher, more physical competition at the collegiate level.

"Personally, it was definitely a wake-up call for me," Sensabaugh said. "Obviously, it's a big jump from high school with the pace and the strength. I'm just locking in personally and learning from the older guys and the coaches, as well, what it really takes to be a Big Ten player and match up with these kinds of guys.

"I'm just kind of flipping the switch here recently and just looking to continue growing and just showing more on the court."