

Simon Harris Leaves Ohio State Ready For First Head Coach Experience



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On March 19, East Tennessee State officially announced Simon Harris as the ninth head coach in program history. It is Harris' first career head-coaching job and comes just nine months after he joined Ohio State's coaching staff last July.

"I am so excited to welcome Coach Simon Harris as the next head coach of our ETSU women's basketball program," said ETSU athletic director Scott Carter. "His energy, incredible personality and tremendous basketball knowledge will provide the winning edge for the young women in our program. Coach Harris has built relationships throughout the country, and everyone that I have spoken with raves about his quality as a coach, but most importantly as a person. He is an authentic leader, and I am so proud that he is our coach."

"Energy. Personality. Tremendous basketball knowledge. Quality as a coach, but most importantly as a person." These are the things Carter had to say about the former Ohio State assistant, and they are the same things that both forwards Aaliyah Patty and Gabby Hutcherson said about Harris on March 25 in their one year of experience with him.

"He's very energetic. As a coach he was just motivating us," Patty told BSB. "He always wanted to win. He didn't like losing, which of course nobody does. But he was very passionate about us winning and getting us to do everything that we could to win. I would just say that was what he brought for us."

Hutcherson focused more on how personable Harris was as a coach and how much easier that made it for her to learn as a first-year player.

"Oh, (I developed under Harris) like an amazing amount," Hutcherson said. "I mean he was just a great coach. He's a person that you could talk to, a good person as well. He made it easy. He made it easier by not always coming at you as a coach, just as a person and being able to talk to you like you're

another person instead of their player. He was good at that, and so it made things easier and helped me understand everything more.”

Being the coach whom players can talk to is something that Harris has made a focal point in his mentality. But he told BSB on March 26 it is something that holds weight for him in ways that expand past the basketball court.

“I think I emphasize it in life,” Harris said. “I’m huge on being there for people if they need me. I graduated not too long ago. I was them, so I just think it’s huge. I’m here to help people. I’m here to serve people. I’m here to listen to people and just be the conduit for them to get out in the world and thrive.”

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said he viewed Harris’ stint at Ohio State as “one more different experience before he tried to become a head coach just to further ready himself,” so he was not surprised to see the former Dayton and N.C. State assistant part from the program so quickly.

As for why Harris wanted to come to the Buckeyes for that final piece of experience, he said the program speaks for itself. But Harris said it also had something to do with who is at the top of Ohio State’s athletic department.

“I mean it’s Ohio State. It is The Ohio State University” Harris said. “Coach McGuff in and of himself allowed me to operate as his right-hand man in so many things in order to actually have a tangible understanding of what this process is.

“I think a major thing in our discussions, especially for me, was coming and working for what I consider to be one of the most powerful men in college athletics who also looks like me. (Athletic director) Gene Smith was such a big appeal. I’ve been such an admirer of his from afar for so many years just growing up in college athletics. And the way that he goes about his business and he’s so process-oriented and people-oriented.”

With such a quick turnaround, there was bound to be some growing pains when Harris came to Ohio State, and Hutcherson said there were, but only small ones that were quickly fixed. She said that Harris had to gain a bit of an understanding for the type of personalities that were on the roster.

“I mean we’re an interesting group of girls I would say,” Hutcherson said. “Just adjusting to little things and the way we talk around each other or how we react to things. Stuff like that might have been an adjustment, but he did it quickly. I feel like he’s had enough experience, and the teams he’s coached are so diverse. He has all these people that he’s coached before coming from different backgrounds, so none of it was really a big change for him. I feel like he adjusted well, and he adapted well.”

McGuff was the last of five head coaches under whom Harris was an assistant, starting with Archie Miller as an assistant on the Dayton men’s basketball team from 2011-14, then on Dayton’s women’s team from 2014-18 under Jim Jabir and Shauna Green before going back to his alma mater, N.C. State, under women’s coach Wes Moore from 2018-20.

As a constant student of the game, Harris said having that many head coaches to look at for ideas and advice has been a big help for him in his coaching career.

“For me it’s huge because I want to learn as much as possible,” Harris said. “I genuinely don’t think you

can learn enough about the game of basketball. The best thing that I got was that all five people that I've worked under are just amazing with people."

Harris now moves on from Columbus to Johnson City, Tenn., for his first opportunity to be his own head of a program. His lone expectation for the team in year one is "to just do your best in all situations to the best of your ability."

ETSU finished last season with a 4-16 record, ending the regular season on a six-game losing streak. The Bucs did upset top-seeded Samford in the Southern Conference tournament before ultimately having their season end with a 75-64 loss to Wofford.

Harris is working to help build that program up, but his expectations for the Ohio State team he is leaving behind are much different heading into next season.

"I'm expecting a lot more wins," Harris said. "That roster is incredible, and the major thing is they're all really, really good kids - like in their own way, they're amazing kids. But on top of that, it was amazing to see how collected they were and together they were.

"We were all dealing with the pandemic obviously, but we were dealt a bigger blow during the course of the season (a self-imposed postseason ban), and the fact that they came out and competed at such a high rate every single game is just a testament to who they are."