

Takeaways From Ohio State's Exhibition With Indianapolis



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Ohio State-Indianapolis Takeaways

Ohio State all but opened its men's basketball season with an exhibition against Indianapolis on Nov. 1, welcoming in a new season of play in front of a, well, sparse crowd, which I don't expect will be the case come Nov. 9 against Akron or in general this season. There's excitement around the team in Columbus, even if it isn't quite on the same level as it was during the peak of the Thad Matta era. There will be fans in Value City Arena, and though they may take their time in trusting the Buckeyes again after the end of the 2020-21 season, trust and support are not correlated in Columbus.

With the season returning in this form - one meant to teach Ohio State, not to go on the final record - it feels more appropriate to take things away from this game, rather than to purely recap it.

- Jamari Wheeler certainly plays to character. Out of the first break of the game, with just under 15 minutes to play, he nabbed an Indianapolis pass from the post to the win with one hand, pushed the ball up the court with his handles and finished at the hoop on the other end through contact. He was around the ball all night, and good things seemed to happen for the Buckeyes whenever he was involved defensively. He played a crucial role in a 30-second violation about four minutes later, first when he deflected another pass and then when he teamed up with Key in the corner to defend a last-gasp three-point try that missed the hoop by about a mile. Even when he isn't recording a stat, his effort on that end of the court is just so obvious. He's such a pest on the ball, picking ball handlers up well before half court and causing them the kind of trouble that Ohio State guards have struggled to deal with for years against Big Ten defenses. When he wasn't on the floor, though the Buckeye defense did seem to stagnate a bit. There was a

lot of 2-3 zone to be seen on Monday, and though there were some phenomenal possessions, there were some others that saw Ohio State lose concentration and surrender an easy bucket for it. That could be something of an issue. He had two fouls at the four-minute mark of the first half and probably could have had another one. Ohio State doesn't have the kind of guard depth for him to be consistently out of games with foul trouble.

- I kept track of Cedric Russel from when he first entered the game at just after the 17-minute mark in the second half. I'm very curious in the Louisiana transfer, especially offensively, because he was such a spark plug for Louisiana and the Buckeyes could really use him being that same player in Columbus - but I'm also a little unsure how he'll fit into this offense. He doesn't serve as an obvious fit with the non-Wheeler guards on the outside because he's a liability on defense. So, I wanted to see how he handled that in his first action.

The early returns are... unclear. His first offensive possession was spent primarily on the wing, but he did get the chance to touch the ball twice, both rolling from the wing to the corner. On his first touch, he took one dribble and handed the ball back off. After working his way back into a similar spot, he dribbled a few more times and fired from midrange. His shot didn't fall, but it wasn't a bad look, and the play seemed to call for him to shoot it.

He showed up again a few possessions later offensively, taking the ball up the court off a Branham steal and distributing the ball to Liddell on the wing. It wasn't an assist, but Liddell did score off the pass. Russell finished the day with three points on 1-of-7 shooting. Not much to learn from, but not meaningless, either. He didn't stick out on defense as lost, either. That's a win.

- Speaking of Liddell, he's a known commodity at this point, but it really does bear mentioning - this kid is just so good. He had 12 points and nine boards on the day, but it's obvious that when the Buckeyes need him, he's going to be a critical piece of this offense.

Look no further than the 15:29-13:50 stretch of play in the second half. He opened off that Russell pass with a pretty midrange fadeaway, scored again on the next trip down the floor with an even prettier face-up, dribble, shoot sequence for two more points and then corralled an offensive rebound and drew a foul on the next possession before he capped it with an hit a three-pointer. In about a minute and a half of game time, that's 3-of-3 shooting, one offensive rebound, one foul drawn and seven points. Ohio State's ceiling is going to be as high as its All-American candidate sets it this season, and even though he only played 25 minutes against the Greyhounds, he looked every bit the part of the most important member of the team.