

Transfer Forward Sean Stewart Poised To Tap Into Five-Star Potential At Ohio State



As a highly touted five-star prospect out of basketball factory Montverde, Fla., Academy, Sean Stewart entered college with some lofty expectations.

Following a strong senior season with the Eagles where he averaged 8.5 points and 5.5 rebounds per game and was named a McDonald's All-American, the 6-9 forward joined another basketball powerhouse in Duke to begin his collegiate career, where he was poised to play a major role on a Blue Devils program looking to make another deep run to the NCAA Tournament.

That expected role never seemed to materialize in Durham, N.C., however, as Stewart — stuck behind veteran big men Kyle Filipowski and Mark Mitchell in the frontcourt depth chart — struggled to find consistent playing time with the Blue Devils, averaging 2.6 points and 3.2 rebounds in just 8.4 minutes per contest.

Stewart's disappointing freshman season prompted him to make what he said was a needed change of scenery to another school this offseason, a change he would find at Ohio State, who — in an effort led by then-associate head coach Jake Diebler — heavily recruited him out of high school before falling short to Duke. Now reunited with Diebler and the Buckeyes, Stewart said he is ready to bounce back from his freshman campaign and showcase that untapped five-star potential in Columbus.

"I feel like a lot of people kind of forget that I'm a good player, being at Duke and not playing that much," Stewart said on Thursday in the Value City Arena interview room in his first media appearance as a Buckeye. "So I just want to show that I really can play offense. I'm not a five-man. I can guard the five, do all that stuff. But I'm not a low-post player. I want to show everybody that I can step out, shoot the three, shoot mid-ranges, do all that stuff that a lot of people don't think I can do. And I think I'm going to surprise a lot of people."

Stewart, who committed to Ohio State on May 3, said he chose to join Ohio State this offseason because of the strong relationship he had already established with Diebler during his high school recruitment. According to Stewart, this bond was originally forged while the current Buckeyes leader maintained contact — both in person and over the phone — when he was playing at Montverde, an act that he said created a strong level of trust between the two that was rekindled when he entered the portal.

“In the transfer portal, it’s such a different landscape than when you’re coming out of high school. So me and my family really valued prior relationships,” Stewart said. “Diebler, when I was in high school, he called, texted me every day. He was at my games in Orlando. So just having that relationship with him already, it kind of put him over the top of everybody. I really trust him, he trusts me.”

Stewart said it is not only Diebler who has shown trust in him to tap into his star potential, but also his teammates, some of whom had also developed pre-existing relationships with the former Duke forward. Stewart was teammates with fellow transfer and former Kentucky center Aaron Bradshaw during the McDonald’s All-American game in 2023, while he also played for the same AAU program as junior guard and team captain Bruce Thornton.

“I feel like I’m really able to grow here,” he added. “Diebler and his staff really trust me, my teammates trust me to make mistakes, shoot the ball, really expand my game. So I’m really excited to be here.”

Part of Stewart’s growing process at Ohio State involves improving on the offensive end, an aspect of his game that often lagged behind at Duke. Stewart pointed out that his strength on the court lies within his defense — which he was able to improve upon while bruising against former ACC forwards and current pros D.J. Burns and Armando Bacot — but he also said that he has committed himself during the offseason to becoming a more versatile player on offense by working on his three-point shooting.

Stewart did not attempt a three-point field goal in his freshman season at Duke, scoring most of his points inside the paint to allow him to shoot 57.1 percent from the field.

“I’ve really been working all summer on my three-point shot,” Stewart said. “Diebler, he really trusts me to shoot, he gets mad at me when I don’t shoot the ball. So that’s just really some I’ve been excited about. Having Diebler and his staff wanting me to shoot, my teammates wanting me to shoot. So they want me to get the ball in the post, face up, make a jump shot, make a play.

“So that’s really one of the reasons I came here. In my meetings and stuff before I made a decision, Diebler told me that he would trust me to make plays and kind of initiate some offense. So that made me really excited to come here.”

With an improved shot and some already solid defense, Stewart could be ready to take that next step in his development and emerge as a versatile forward for the Buckeyes next season. Stewart’s development could go a long way in propelling Ohio State back to relevancy in the Big Ten and beyond, something which the five-star said could spark some excitement for the upcoming campaign for what he thinks is a passionate and loyal Buckeye fanbase.

“My junior year (of high school), I really watched a lot of Ohio State basketball. And even when I committed to Duke, I still watched because my teammate in high school, (former Ohio State forward) Brice Sensabaugh, was here. So I really love the fan base and how crazy the games get. It’s a huge arena. The whole fan base, football, all that stuff really plays into effect how big the fan base is and how much love everybody here gives. And I know that if we’re a really good team, everybody will support and show love.”