

Women's Basketball Year In Review: Cotie McMahon



It was clear from the jump that freshman forward Cotie McMahon would be a significant contributor for Ohio State, but few foresaw the impact that she would end up having on the Buckeyes.

McMahon started in Ohio State's preseason exhibition, scoring 9 points with six assists in the Buckeyes' 118-33 win over Notre Dame College. She remained in the starting lineup when Ohio State officially opened the season against Tennessee on Nov. 8, finishing with 10 points on 5-of-6 shooting in the 87-75 win over the then-fifth-ranked team in the country.

Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said after the game that the Buckeyes' would be fluid with their starting lineups depending on how different matchups might shake out, but McMahon wound up as one of just three players - along with guards Taylor Mikesell and Taylor Thierry - to play in and start every game last season for Ohio State. Furthermore, as soon as the opener against the Volunteers, it was clear that McMahon's energy would be an important factor for the Buckeyes moving forward.

"She's got a lot of talent, and the good news is I think she's really just scratching the surface of it, but she's working hard at it," McGuff said. "She's already made a lot of progress, but she's still really got a long way to go to reach the great potential that she has."

McMahon would take some time to begin reaching that potential, however. She scored just 10 total points over the next three games, and after 16- and 20-point outings against Wright State and North Alabama, respectively, she played just six minutes - all in the first half - in Ohio State's 96-77 win over Louisville on Nov. 30, picking up two fouls and turning the ball over twice in her brief time on the court.

"She's going to be a spectacular player for us, and everyone's seen how good she is already," McGuff said. "But in this particular game, I wanted to lean on our experience."

That benching was a lightbulb moment for McMahon, who kicked things into high gear for the

remainder of the season. She scored 20 points in a win over New Hampshire and added 24 points in a win over UAlbany ahead of arguably her best performance of the season, scoring a career-high 30 points in Ohio State's 88-86 win in overtime over South Florida on Dec. 20, and had the game-winning assist to Thierry.

McMahon finished the regular season on a tear, scoring in double digits in 13 of the next 17 games and notching her first career double-double with 17 points and 11 rebounds in a 67-55 win at Penn State on Feb. 16. For the entire regular season, McMahon averaged 14.0 points, 4.8 rebounds, 2.5 assists and 1.6 steals on 51.7 percent shooting, second on the team in scoring behind Mikesell.

She continued that high level of play into the postseason, averaging 21.0 points and 11.0 rebounds on 50.0 percent shooting in Ohio State's three games in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, including a 28-point, 12-rebound performance in the quarterfinals against Michigan.

"Incredible player," McGuff said after that game. "It's been a long time since I've seen somebody that young play so hard. She competes on every possession. She competes on every possession in practice. Really fun to see."

As Ohio State moved on to the NCAA tournament after a loss to Iowa in the conference tournament finals, it was the first taste of tournament play for McMahon, but that wasn't evident when she took Ohio State's home court for the Buckeyes' first two tournament games. She scored 18 points in the first round against James Madison and had 14 points and nine rebounds just two days later against North Carolina.

Even with those impressive performances and the way McMahon had played beyond her years for most of the season, that didn't mean there wasn't still room for growth, though. Late in the win over the Dukes, McMahon picked up her fifth foul and, disagreeing with the call, spiked the basketball and picked up a technical foul that sent James Madison to the free-throw line. It didn't end up impacting the game, but she said her emotions were high and she let them - for a brief moment - get the best of her.

"Obviously, if it was a different outcome, if it was a close game, I could have really affected the team and possibly could have sent us home," she said. "Of course I grew up from this, and it won't happen again."

She stayed calm and collected, though, during all of Ohio State's upset over UConn in the Sweet 16, scoring a team-high 23 points on 8-of-17 shooting and adding five rebounds, two assists and two steals. Despite the Buckeyes trailing early, she helped lead Ohio State to the program's first Elite Eight appearance since 1993.

"Oh, my gosh, the level that this game was played at and how she performed was awesome," guard Jacy Sheldon said after the game. "It speaks for itself. She's an amazing player, amazing teammate, and she's a freshman, which is crazy. So like coach says all the time, she's just scratching the surface of what she can do, but tonight she was outstanding."

McMahon had a respectable 18 points and seven rebounds in Ohio State's eventual loss to Virginia Tech that ended the season, but her growth through the season and through the team's conference and NCAA tournament runs has set the stage for McMahon to be the star for Ohio State moving forward.

As she prepares to enter her second season with the Buckeyes - even if it feels like she's been at Ohio

State longer, or at least plays like she has - the sky continues to be the limit after a phenomenal freshman season for the Centerville native.

"I haven't been around a player in a long time that's just got such a joy for the game," McGuff said after the win over UConn. "She loves to play the game. I watched her in AAU in high school. You could tell that she was very talented. But I was really shocked at how hard she practices. She practices hard every day, and she really works at it, which gives me great optimism that we're just still kind of scratching the surface of the player she's going to end up being."