

Women's Basketball Year In Review: Eboni Walker



For most of last season, it was a feeling out process between Ohio State and forward Eboni Walker, who transferred to Columbus after two seasons at Arizona State and another one-year stint at Syracuse.

Walker had no preconceived notions about what might be in store for her with the Buckeyes, but after jumping around at different schools, she was happy to find a home.

"I wasn't looking for anything," she said before the season. "I was just looking for a fit that represented me as a person, not so much of the basketball, because I know that I can play basketball. We're going to win games, we're going to lose games. That's the game. I want to feel supported as a person as well."

Walker offered depth for Ohio State at forward and in the post during the program's 19-0 start to begin the season. She appeared in 17 of those games, averaging around 11 minutes per contest with 3.7 points, 2.6 rebounds and 1.1 assists, usually spelling forward Rebeka Mikulášiková.

She was a capable shooter as well, knocking shots down at a 50.0 percent clip through that first stretch of the season, but her minutes - and role - varied from game-to-game.

"I think it's been a bit of a learning curve for being in our program and how we do things — just the more experience she gets, even just practicing," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said during the season. "I think now it's just a matter of consistency. She's got the talent and she works hard, but she's got to be much more consistent."

Walker took on an increased role, though, when Mikulášiková suffered an ankle sprain against Minnesota on Feb. 8 just minutes into the contest and missed the remainder of the game, as well as Ohio State's matchup against Indiana just five days later. In relief of Mikulášiková against the Gophers, Walker played a then-season-high 26 minutes, scoring 12 points on 4-of-7 shooting and adding six rebounds.

In her first start against the Hoosiers, Walker again reached 12 points, and added 11 rebounds for her fourth career double-double, and her first with Ohio State. While the Buckeyes suffered an 83-59

blowout on their own court, it still showed that Walker could help to carry Ohio State down the stretch.

Mikulášiková returned from injury on Feb. 16 at Penn State, but Walker had fully supplanted her position in the starting lineup at that point, starting every game for the rest of the season for Ohio State while Mikulášiková began to come off the bench.

Walker had a mostly quiet ending to the regular season and through the Big Ten Tournament, averaging just 2.0 points and 3.7 rebounds on 21.4 percent shooting in three games. She saw a return to form in Ohio State's NCAA Tournament opener against James Madison, going for 9 points and four rebounds, but it set the stage for perhaps the best game of her career across her multiple stops.

In the second round against North Carolina, Walker finished with a career-high 15 points on 4-of-7 shooting, adding seven rebounds, three assists and a steal for the Buckeyes. She was also a pivotal part of guard Jacy Sheldon's game-winner, passing up an earlier opportunity to get the ball to Sheldon and instead getting a couple more passes in before Sheldon got the ball for the game-winner over the Tar Heels.

"I'm really proud of Eboni," McGuff said after the game. "We've all in the program watched her in practice, in flashes, in games of what she did today, and this was her best game and biggest moment when we needed it the most."

Walker had a continued impact against UConn and Virginia Tech, averaging 6.0 points, 5.0 rebounds, 3.0 assists and 1.5 steals over those two games, and it wrapped what turned into a successful season for the Las Vegas native. With one season of eligibility remaining for Walker, a strong finish to the season should translate into some continued momentum heading into her final season of college basketball.