

Women's Basketball Year In Review: Jacy Sheldon



Early in the season for Ohio State, it appeared that senior guard Jacy Sheldon was well on her way to joining fellow guard Taylor Mikesell in potentially departing for the WNBA Draft.

She picked up right where she left off from the 2021-22 season through the Buckeyes' first four games, averaging 15.4 points, 3.5 rebounds, 4.0 assists and an unfathomable 6.8 steals, including an 11-steal performance in a win at Boston College that tied Ohio State's single-game record.

But, Sheldon came out of that stretch of games with a limp, missing Ohio State's next two games while wearing a boot on her right leg on the sideline. She returned when the Buckeyes played at Louisville on Nov. 30, scoring 22 points with three rebounds and three steals in 39 minutes, but that would be the last time she would take the court for Ohio State until February.

Sheldon was dealing with a lower-leg injury that head coach Kevin McGuff called week-to-week, but the weeks turned to months as Sheldon continued to rehab her injury. McGuff said the team was giving her "ample time to fully heal" so that Sheldon would be available for the end of the season and not risk re aggravating the injury by bringing her back to early.

"We're getting closer," McGuff said on Jan. 17. "We're just making sure we give it ample time to fully heal so we can have her at 100 percent down the stretch. But we're getting closer, for sure."

Sheldon was upgraded to day-to-day entering February and made her long-awaited return on Feb. 5 at Maryland, though she finished with just 5 points, five rebounds and three assists on 2-of-8 shooting, playing 25 minutes in the 90-54 blowout.

"It felt good. I obviously missed playing with everybody," she said after the game. "We could have played better tonight and had a lot more energy."

Despite Sheldon's comfort level with her return, she was held out of the final five games of the regular season for Ohio State. McGuff said there was no setback with her injury, but that the Buckeyes were continuing to use a conservative approach to ensure her availability for the final stretch of the season.

"It's really, at this point, making sure we have her whole body so we don't put her in position to risk something else," McGuff said. "She's chomping at the bit to play. It's probably more me right now than anything, still day-to-day.

"I'm watching her move - and I'll just be frank - I didn't think she was moving (at Maryland) like she normally does when she was healthy, so I took a step back and said, 'Hey, I just want to make sure we're doing the right thing here.'"

Sheldon returned to the court again for Ohio State's run in the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, coming off the bench in all three games and averaging 6.0 points, 2.0 assists and 2.0 steals on 40.0 percent shooting in 15 minutes per contest, well below her usual time on the floor. Whether due to her extended time off the court or her continued recovery from her leg injury - or perhaps a factor of both - Sheldon did not look like her usual self.

The Buckeyes then had two weeks off before the NCAA Tournament began, and that time is evidently what was needed to right the ship. In Ohio State's opening round matchup against James Madison, Sheldon returned to the starting lineup and looked much closer to the Sheldon that the Buckeyes have been accustomed to over the past four seasons, finishing with 17 points, five rebounds, nine assists and four steals in the win.

The next game, though, provided a highlight for Sheldon despite what was a challenging season. With Ohio State and North Carolina knotted up at 69 with under 10 seconds remaining, Sheldon drove into the paint and connected on the go-ahead basket to give the Buckeyes their eventual 71-69 win and secure the program's appearance in the Sweet 16 for the second consecutive season.

"It was really special," Sheldon said. "Being at our home court one more time this year and in March makes it even that much more special. I think sometimes in March, specifically, you have to find a way to win, and that's what we did today, and we did it together."

Sheldon continued her impressive tournament run over Ohio State's next two games, scoring 17 points to go with seven rebounds and five assists in the Buckeyes' upset of UConn, and in the season-ending loss to Virginia Tech, Sheldon still finished with 19 points on 7-of-14 shooting. Across four tournament games, Sheldon averaged 17.3 points, 5.8 rebounds, 5.0 assists and 2.3 steals on 40.0 percent shooting, and played 37 minutes per game, rarely leaving the court for the Buckeyes.

And while those numbers likely would have been enough for Sheldon to hear her name called at the WNBA Draft despite missing most of the season, shortly after Ohio State's campaign concluded, she announced that she had unfinished business in Columbus, set to return for a fifth season and help Ohio State get back to the Elite Eight.

Unfinished business. @OhioStateWBB pic.twitter.com/fmupOsUMOS

— Jacy (@JacySheldon) March 29, 2023