

Zed Key, Kyle Young Will Be Game-Time Decisions Vs. Loyola Chicago



Two days out from its opening NCAA Tournament matchup, Ohio State's lineup is still unsettled. Head coach Chris Holtmann told gathered media on March 16 that there are no new updates on center Zed Key or forward Kyle Young - both stalwart pieces of the Buckeye rotation this season - and that both players will be game-time decisions as they continue to deal with lingering injuries that held them out of the final stretch of Ohio State's season.

"As far as our health right now, I think we're getting healthier. I have no update on Kyle or Zed, those will be game-time decisions right now," Holtmann said. "We'll know more here, honestly, in a couple of days. I don't have an answer for you right now."

Key has been on and off since twisting his ankle in Ohio State's Feb. 27 loss to Maryland. He didn't play on March 1 against Nebraska or March 3 against Michigan State, but returned briefly against Michigan on March 6, only to aggravate his injury - which in turn held him out of Ohio State's opening round Big Ten Tournament loss to Penn State on March 10. Holtmann said after that Michigan game that Key likely would have been better served on the bench, continuing his recovery.

Young has been unavailable since the loss to Nebraska when he sustained a blow to the head in the first half that has sent him into concussion protocol for the third time in as many seasons. His 2020-21 season was ended by a pair sustained in the final month of play.

Holtmann said that both have been able to participate some in practice, but they've yet to be cleared and that he has no definitive answer right now. On Selection Sunday, Holtmann said that he would not be optimistic for the outlook on the big man pairing if the Buckeyes were playing in a First Four matchup, which tipped off on Tuesday and will continue tonight.

He did officially rule out forward Justice Sueing, who has missed nearly the entire season with a lower-body injury. Meechie Johnson Jr., who was out against the Nittany Lions, is expected to return. Fellow

guard Malaki Branham said that he's not faced any long-term ill effects after rolling his ankle against Penn State, which he played through without much trouble at the time on the way to a 16-point performance.

"No, not really," Branham said when asked if the ankle was bothering him. "I've rolled my ankle a few times (before), so it wasn't as bad. I pushed through."

Ohio State will have had a week to rest to recuperate between its last game and this next one, which winger Justin Ahrens described as a positive spin on that early league exit.

Given this specific matchup, strength on the interior could prove critical for the bruised Buckeyes. Loyola Chicago is one of the best shooting teams in the nation, ranking seventh in effective field goal percentage, but has only one contributor bigger than 6-7 and has struggled on the offensive boards at times.

Ohio State has had similar issues keeping opponents out of the offensive rebounding category on the stat sheet, and if it has those problems again with a foe not known for its dominance there, it could be in for a long afternoon. Additionally, few teams have more success offensive off of screens than the Ramblers - they're No. 21 in points per possession scored out of ball-screen sets - and Young is one of the few Buckeye defenders comfortable with switching off screens.