

Buckeyes Look To Spoil Michigan State's Senior Day Saturday



After picking up a Senior Day win of its own on Wednesday, vanquishing No. 21 Maryland 73-62 at Value City Arena, Ohio State hits the road with the opportunity to play spoiler at Michigan State's Senior Day on Saturday.

While Ohio State provided its departing seniors — Justice Sueing, Sean McNeil and Isaac Likekele — with a victory in their final game on their home floor, the Buckeyes now hope to put a damper on Michigan State's Senior Day while also aiming to claim their third-consecutive win to close out the regular season on a high note. As the Buckeyes venture to East Lansing, Mich., for an early-afternoon matinee, head coach Chris Holtmann recognized the challenge of facing the Spartans at the Breslin Center.

"They're phenomenal at their place. I mean they're incredible on Senior Night," Holtmann said. "It's going to be an incredible environment, it always is there but it's going to be ratcheted up for Senior Night on a weekend.

"We'll have that conversation with our guys because it'll be probably as intense of an environment as we've been in all year."

While emotions will certainly be high at the Breslin Center for Senior Day, the Buckeyes are also eyeing the opportunity to avenge their 62-41 loss at the hands of the Spartans on Feb. 12 at Value City Arena. In that game, Ohio State produced its lowest scoring output since 1996 while shooting just 28.3 percent from the field and 20.7 percent from three.

As Ohio State's offense struggled throughout the contest against the Spartans, assistant coach Mike Netti pointed to several areas that the Buckeyes have identified on film from that game in order to devise their game plan for this bout with Michigan State.

"Mid-second half we started to press a little bit, our shot selection and just our flow offensively just kind of got stale," Netti said. "Some of it was their defense, clearly they're one of the best defensive teams in the league, their numbers don't show it but we know their toughness. Their older guys, they're tough defenders."

"For (Saturday), we're going to have to be us. Where we've been the last couple of games, we've been an efficient and intelligent offense," he continued. "We've taken the right shots, we've played the right way. We've played inside-out, we've finished better — I think our ability to get to the basket and actually convert has helped our numbers. The ability to play the right way has really benefitted our young guys because they see the reward of it."

The Spartans were led by forward Joey Hauser, who tallied 22 points in their last meeting with the Buckeyes, but also have several other players they can rely on to get a bucket. Guard Tyson Walker — who will be honored as part of Senior Day — leads Michigan State with 14.8 points per game while Hauser follows with 14.1 and guard A.J. Hoggard produces 12.2 points per game.

Hauser and Walker lead Michigan State's three-point heavy offense, as the Spartans shoot 39.4 percent from deep — the best mark in the Big Ten. Hauser and Walker have each surpassed 100 three-point attempts this season while registering 44.8 and 43.4 percent shooting respectively.

While the Buckeyes will have their hands full in the regular season finale against the Spartans, Holtmann said his group is still committed to growth and improvement while needing a miracle run in the Big Ten Tournament to have a shot at making the NCAA Tournament.

"You have two options there, you can say 'Hey, I'm going to do my own thing and become independent.' Or 'I'm going to lean into being together, being part of a team and being highly coachable,'" Holtmann said. "It really has been about focusing on the work and the work in front of us each and every day. I think we have tried to communicate to them that if they do that enough, they have to trust that they will see the results."

The Buckeyes and Spartans tip-off at noon Saturday from the Breslin Center and the game will be televised on ESPN.