

Depth Boosting Buckeyes To Unprecedented Start



It would be a tall task to expect any time to continue thriving with the loss of their starting point guard – let alone their top two point guards – but Ohio State has done just that this season.

Despite the loss of Madison Greene for the season to yet another season-ending knee injury and Jacy Sheldon having not played since Nov. 30 while she recovers from a lower-leg injury, the No. 3-ranked Buckeyes are off to a 16-0 start this season, setting a new program record.

The most recent win looked dominant on paper – an 83-71 victory on the road against Minnesota on Thursday – but it was anything but, with Ohio State facing a halftime deficit and down by as many as 10 points during the third quarter. But the Buckeyes fought back, outscoring the Gophers 28-10 to secure the win and remain one of just four undefeated teams in the nation.

“One day, we’ll look back and maybe take note of that, but right now we just had a hard-fought game and found a way to win,” Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said. “We put ourselves in a tough spot, but proud of the kids for finding a way to win this one and get to 16 games.”

The program-record 16 wins to begin the season surpasses the previous program mark of a 15-0 start to the 2011-12 season, in which the Buckeyes – under then-head coach Jim Foster – remained undefeated until a 73-62 loss at Michigan on Jan. 7, 2012, meaning this current squad also sets a new mark for the latest an Ohio State team has gone into a season undefeated entering Sunday’s matchup against Illinois.

And beyond setting the new mark, what this team has done that others haven’t required is utilizing the program’s depth. Guard Taylor Mikesell and forward Rebeka Mikulášiková have been their usual selves for Ohio State, but the Buckeyes have seen contributions from freshman forward Cotie McMahon and guard Taylor Thierry, who has taken a leap in her sophomore season, as well as guard Rikki Harris, who has stepped up at the point with Greene and Sheldon out.

She’s had at least four assists in each of the last four games, including a career-high eight dishes in Ohio State’s win over Oregon on Dec. 21. She’s also reached double-digit scoring totals in the last two games, reaching 14 points against Michigan and a career-high 19 points in the Buckeyes’ win over Minnesota.

But she's just one factor of the depth that has allowed Ohio State to thrive despite injuries, and McGuff has been pleased to see everyone across the roster step up.

"It's been tough," McGuff said. "Obviously, those injuries are critical pieces to what we do, but we've had people step up. Rikki's done a great job taking over the point guard duties, we've gotten great minutes out of Emma (Shumate), Eboni (Walker) and Hevynne (Bristow). It's not ideal, it's not easy, but I do like the fact that our kids are doing whatever they can to try to find a way to continue to get better and win."