

Jamison Battle's Three Lifts Ohio State To Last-Second Win Over Cornell In First Round Of NIT



Ohio State (21-13, 9-11) used a strong finish and clutch late-game shooting from fifth-year guard Jamison Battle to sneak past Cornell (22-8, 11-3) in the first round of the NIT held at Value City Arena on Tuesday night, defeating the Big Red 88-83 to advance to the second round in Jake Diebler's first game as the program's full-time head coach.

The Buckeyes, who will now face off against either No. 1 seed Wake Forest or Appalachian State in the second round held March 26 or March 27, trailed 81-79 with 1:04 remaining but finished the game on a 9-2 run, a sequence propelled by the veteran Battle, who provided the game-winning three for the Buckeyes with 43 seconds left to lift them to the last-second victory.

Ohio State struggled from the field early on, making four of its first 22 shots — just 18.2 percent — as Cornell jumped out to an early 19-9 lead. Sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr. broke a 2:52 scoring drought with his first triple in four attempts to trail 19-12 with 12:04 left, sparking a 17-5 run for the Buckeyes that allowed them to take a 26-24 lead with 7:00 remaining after consecutive threes from sophomore Bruce Thornton.

After four Cornell threes put them back up 36-32 with 3:10 left, Ohio State closed the half strong with a 12-2 run — featuring two triples from Battle — to take a 44-38 lead into the locker room.

Ohio State shot just 39.5 percent from the field in the first half (17 of 43) and 42.9 percent from the free-throw line (3 of 7) but made seven of its 18 tries from beyond the arc. It also pummeled the Big Red on the glass, holding a 32-16 advantage on the glass and a 11-0 edge in offensive rebounds.

After a back-and-forth start to the second half, Cornell slowly assumed momentum, utilizing a 9-4 run to take a 57-56 lead with 13:26 left after a number of interior layups and a Guy Ragland Jr. triple from the

Big Red. Ohio State stayed within striking distance in the ensuing minutes and retook a one-point lead with 9:20 left after a Devin Royal dunk, but the Big Red struck back and led by two, 66-64, following a Ragland layup.

The Buckeyes had another response, though, this time going on a 10-3 run that included multiple second-chance baskets to retake a 74-69 lead with 5:07 left after a Bowen Hardman three, his first make since Diebler assumed head coaching duties. The game continued to seesaw down the stretch as Cornell went on a 6-1 run to take a 76-75 lead with 3:14 remaining after a Gray layup.

Gray was called for a technical foul after the basket, though, allowing Battle to immediately tie the game at 76 by going 1-for-2 from the free throw line and Ohio State to eventually retake a 79-76 lead. But Cornell responded once again, getting a three from Nazir Williams and an acrobatic layup from Gray to take an 81-79 lead.

Ohio State had the last laugh, getting a corner three-pointer from Battle on the ensuing possession and — after a loose-ball led to a jump ball to give the Buckeyes back possession — a Royal layup to lead 84-81 with just 30 seconds left. Ohio State closed the game with four straight free throws to close the game on a 9-2 run and advance to the second round.

Ohio State was led in the win by Gayle and Battle, who each scored 17 points on a combined 12-of-28 shooting, with Battle going 3-of-4 from three. Okpara added a career-high 16 points along with seven rebounds, while Royal had 13. Cornell was led by Ragland Jr., who finished with 17 points on 7-of-14 shooting.

Ohio State will advance to take on either Wake Forest or Appalachian State at Value City Arena in the second round of the NIT Tournament. The game will either take place Saturday or Sunday with tip time to be announced later.