

Loss To Minnesota Highlights Ohio State's Issues In Recent Stretch



Ohio State's season hit a low point on Thursday.

The Buckeyes fell to Minnesota — which entered the game 0-4 in Big Ten play — 70-67 and extended its losing streak to three games. Although Ohio State sleepwalked through much of the game, the Buckeyes found themselves in a position to win late after a pair of free throws from Brice Sensabaugh knotted the game at 67 with 8.6 seconds to play. However, a controversial foul call on guard Bruce Thornton — which the Big Ten has since stated was a clean block and should not have been called a foul — allowed Minnesota guard Ta'Lon Cooper and forward Dawson Garcia to ice the game at the line.

Although Thornton's phantom foul has been a topic of discussion among Ohio State fans, head coach Chris Holtmann noted that the Buckeyes should not have been in that situation in the first place.

"In some ways, if we had won it, it would have been a bit of a disservice because I'm not sure we deserved it," Holtmann said. "They did a great job clawing back, our guys did, and they did a good job executing late. But, the reality is I'm not really sure we earned this one."

Ohio State appeared to be in position to become a Big Ten heavyweight after a 2-0 start in conference play. Even a tight loss to then-No. 1 Purdue on Jan. 5 did little in the way of dispelling any confidence in the team. However back-to-back losses to less-than-impressive competition in Maryland and Minnesota have pushed the Buckeyes below .500 in the Big Ten.

With the Buckeyes enduring their first three-game losing streak since late February 2021, Holtmann said that there are plenty of areas with needed improvement going forward.

"You just focus on the task at hand and that is getting better," Holtmann said. "We're not into focusing on the big picture, we have to get better in areas. That's the charge in front of me and I've got to do a better job of getting them better."

During the three-game stretch, the Buckeyes have seen their scoring efficiency drop dramatically. Ohio State entered its bout with Purdue averaging 81.0 points per game while shooting 49.2 percent as a team, but since then the Buckeyes' averages have dropped to 69.7 points per game while shooting just 43.5 percent from the field.

The offensive bubble burst against Minnesota, and the Buckeyes registered their worst offensive outing of the season according to Holtmann. Ohio State settled for shots early in the shot clock and relied on several players to play in isolation while shooting just 37.5 percent from the field in the loss.

"It was our worst offensive game of the year," Holtmann said. "Give (Minnesota) credit. I thought them going under ball screens bothered us.

"It was our poorest offensive outing in quite some time, certainly this year."

Things will not get any easier for Ohio State moving forward. The Buckeyes travel to The RAC to take on a Rutgers team that has won three of its last four games on Sunday. As OSU looks to put an end to this losing stretch, guard Sean McNeil emphasized that the Buckeyes have to put the last three games behind them and put it all on the line against the Scarlet Knights.

"Obviously we have a short turnaround, so we can't sulk on this one," McNeil said. "Obviously we want to figure out what we did wrong and there was a decent amount of mistakes that we made. Give credit to (Minnesota), they're a really good team. But we didn't play up to our standard of basketball (Thursday), offensively or defensively.

"We'll go back and watch a lot of film and really just prepare," he continued. "(We'll) take the time that's reasonable to figure out how to get better from this loss and focus on going winning at Rutgers."