

No. 14 James Madison Offers “Real Challenge” In No. 3 Ohio State’s NCAA Opener



No. 3 Ohio State will open play in the NCAA Women’s Basketball Tournament on Saturday, set to host No. 14 James Madison at 1:30 p.m. in The Schottenstein Center.

Though the Dukes enter as one of the lower-seeded teams in the tournament, they still boast a 26-7 record and secured both the regular-season and conference titles within the Sun Belt Conference, and it isn’t a challenge that Ohio State is taking lightly.

“We have great respect for James Madison,” Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said Friday. “They’re a team that’s used to being in the tournament, so I know they’re going to show up prepared. They have an elite player in Kiki Jefferson, who is going to be a real challenge for us.”

Jefferson is James Madison’s leader on the court, averaging 18.3 points and 7.9 rebounds per game, both of which lead the team. She’s also the Dukes’ leading free-throw shooter, attempts nearly eight foul shots per game and knocking them down at a 79.7 percent clip.

James Madison has another guard, Peyton McDaniel, who averages double-digit scoring at 11.6 points per game, while center Kseniia Kozlova – who stands at 6-4 – adds 10.7 points and 5.6 rebounds. Guard Caroline Germond does not have the scoring or rebounding acumen of her teammates, but she has dished out a team-high 116 assists (3.7 per game) this season.

“They have good post players,” McGuff said. “They’ve got some balance in what they do. They play a lot of man, but they’ll also switch their defenses, maybe throw in a little press in there to slow us down.

“So I think our ability to kind of recognize what they’re doing and stay organized and execute accordingly will be really important.”

That defensive flexibility has helped the Dukes hold opponents to just 36.0 percent shooting from the field and 39.5 percent from inside the arc this season, both ranking within the top 20 nationally. Ohio State, conversely, is shooting 46.4 percent from the field this season, so the Dukes will have their hands

full on the defensive end.

“They’re a really talented team,” Ohio State guard Taylor Mikesell said. “I actually had played them twice when I was at Maryland prior, and they’ve always been good, well-coached team. They play really hard. They have some good guards, and they have a really good pace to their play. It will be a good game, and we’ll be ready.”