

No. 22 Ohio State Rides E.J. Liddell To Overcome 8-Point Halftime Deficit In 90-85 Win At Notre Dame



After trailing by eight points at halftime, the Ohio State men's basketball team rallied behind a brilliant second half from E.J. Liddell to a 90-85 victory at Notre Dame on Dec. 8.

Liddell, a sophomore forward, followed up a two-point first half in which he shot 0 for 5 from the field with a 17-point second half on 7-of-10 shooting to finish with 19 points, 12 rebounds and three blocks.

"Excuse my language mom, but Coach chewed my ass at halftime, " Liddell said. "And I just came out in the second half going hard, trying to play my hardest."

After Notre Dame freshman forward Matt Zona and Liddell exchanged buckets, the Irish's leading scorer, junior guard Prentiss Hubb drilled a three-pointer to tie the game at 75 with 3:12 left.

Ohio State junior guard Duane Washington knocked down a shot from deep and Liddell converted an old-fashioned three-point play with two Hubb foul shots in between to make it 81-77 with 2:17 to play.

After Irish junior center Nate Laszewski hit a clutch three-pointer, Ohio State fourth-year junior wing Justice Sueing and Liddell converted consecutive baskets to push the lead to 85-80 with 50 seconds left. Liddell's bucket was a step-back midrange jumper that swished through the net as the shot clock expired.

"I actually didn't know the time on the clock; Duane was just yelling, 'Shoot it,' and I looked up at the last second and saw there were two seconds on the clock," Liddell said. "I just feel like that was a huge momentum swing for us."

Ohio State appeared to have the game in hand, but Sueing split a pair of foul shots after Hubb hit both of his free throws, and the Buckeyes led 86-82 with 34 seconds to play. Hubb gave the Irish life with an and-1 play to cut the deficit to 86-85 with 22 ticks on the clock.

Notre Dame fouled C.J. Walker twice in an attempt to stop the clock and stay alive, but the fifth-year senior guard knocked down all four of his final foul shots to secure the win. Walker totaled 16 points and made all eight of his free throws.

"It was a tough, hard-fought road win, and our guys responded," said Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann. "We really played some really solid moments in the second half and a lot of a lot of contributions from a lot of guys, so it was a great team win."

The Buckeyes cut the Irish lead to 45-41 just 2:43 into the second half on a triple from Walker and a layup from Washington following a steal.

Notre Dame took its biggest lead of the game at 55-44 after a 10-3 run with 14:38 left. The Buckeyes bounced back with a 7-0 streak ending with a three-pointer by senior guard Jimmy Sotos with 12:52 remaining.

Ohio State fourth-year junior wing Musa Jallow caught an alley-oop pass from Washington and slammed it home, sparking a 6-0 streak that gave the Buckeyes a 62-61 lead with 8:44 left.

Jallow jolted Ohio State to its largest lead of the game at 69-64 with an and-1 finish with 6:24 left after Walker took a charge to gain possession. The Irish answered with back-to-back three-pointers by junior guard Dane Goodwin and Hubb to go up 70-69 with 5:41 to play.

After missing two games in a row, Jallow gave the Buckeyes a massive spark off the bench with seven points and shutdown defense.

"I wasn't even sure I was going to play him, but this game required his defensive IQ and his ability to switch and guard different people," Holtmann said. "We don't win the game without Musa Jallow tonight, obviously."

Ohio State scored four straight to take a 73-70 lead with 4:56 left on a layup by Sueing and two free throws from Washington.

After Notre Dame opened the game with a 6-2 lead through the first 3:20 of the game, Washington, Sueing and Walker drilled three straight three-pointers in just 1:25 to take a five-point lead. Hubb, answered with two three-pointers in a 36-second span to spark an 8-0 streak and 12-2 run to give the home team an 18-13 lead with 11:24 until halftime.

Ohio State and Notre Dame continued to exchange runs for most of the first half with the Buckeyes scoring five straight on a triple by junior wing Justin Ahrens and a pair of free throws from Liddell to tie the game at 18 with 10:02 left. The Irish answered by ripping off seven straight points before the Buckeyes rallied on an 8-0 stretch capped by triples from Ahrens and Washington to take a 26-25 lead with 6:19 left in the first half.

After battling back and forth with the Irish, Ohio State tied the game at 34 on Ahrens third three-pointer on as many attempts with 3:18 until intermission. Notre Dame changed the game at the end of the first frame, ending the half on an 8-0 run.

The Scarlet and Gray shot 37.9 percent from the floor (11 for 29) and 46.7 percent from deep (7 for 15) and the Blue and Gold knocked down 50 percent of their field goals (16 of 32) and 35.7 from beyond the arc across the game's first 20 minutes. Both teams shot 5 of 6 on foul shots and committed six turnovers.

Notre Dame junior guard Cormac Ryan scored all 15 of his points in the first half on 5-of-7 shooting;

Hubb had eight points, four rebounds and four assists, and Laszewski added eight points and seven boards. Ahrens led Ohio State with nine points, and Sueing added seven points and three assists at the midway point.

"The second half was considerably better; we moved the ball, we played together more on both ends in the second half," Holtmann said. "A lot of respect for this Notre Dame team, they spread you out. (Notre Dame head coach) Mike (Brey) does a tremendous job with them. They're really a difficult guard. And we struggled guarding them quite honestly, we just did. We struggled guarding them for the whole game, and we're going to have to get better at that, but give Notre Dame a lot of credit."

What changed in the second half for the Buckeyes?

"I felt like we were more connected," Liddell said. "Everybody was picking me up, and I felt like I needed that. My teammates had my back no matter what; they just kept telling me to play how I know how to play. And I was just telling everybody to keep shooting the ball, just being positive. And we came back out the second half with a different mindset."

Overall, Hubb led all scorers with 26 points; Laszewski finished with 17 points and nine boards; and Goodwin, a former Thad Matta commit, added 16 points for the Irish.

Sueing scored 16 points and dished four assists for Ohio State, while Washington scored 13 points with four dimes, and Ahrens added 12.

The Buckeyes were excellent in the second half, shooting 54.5 percent overall (18 of 33), 50 percent from deep (4 of 8), and 88.9 percent from the line (16 of 18). The Irish were solid at 51.9 percent from the floor (14 of 27), 60 percent (6 of 10) on threes, and 75 percent on foul shots (9 of 12), but they committed seven turnovers to two for Ohio State.

"It's a big win," Jallow said. "And it is good level of competition to set us up going into Big Ten play, especially on the road. Especially since they had some fans there chirping at us, so that was a good thing to get out of the way for the first time. It was a good, tough win to gut it out, and it gives guys a lot of confidence and shows the younger guys what it takes to win."

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