

No. 3 Ohio State Outlasts No. 6 North Carolina 71-69 To Secure Berth In Sweet 16



No. 3 Ohio State overcame a late push from No. 6 North Carolina to come away with a 71-69 win at The Schottenstein Center on Monday, securing the Buckeyes' appearance in the Sweet 16 next weekend.

North Carolina broke through to take a 67-66 lead with just over two minutes remaining and later tied the game at 69 with 9.8 seconds remaining, but Ohio State guard Jacy Sheldon hit a floater with just 1.8 seconds left to give the Buckeyes the final lead.

Flipping the script from their last few outings, Ohio State got off to a fast start by opening up with an 11-2 lead, forcing misses on North Carolina's first six shots of the game and forcing four turnovers during that span.

The Buckeyes' three-point shooting also showed early improvement after a 2 of 17 outing against James Madison, with guard Taylor Mikesell connecting on a triple just a minute-and-a-half into the game. North Carolina shook off the early blows by responding with an 8-0 run and connecting on five of its last six shots of the quarter to trail just 16-14 after the first.

Ohio State scored the first six points of the second quarter to go up 22-14 with 8:00 left in the first half, but North Carolina was able to hang around, cutting the deficit to as few as five points by halftime to trail 33-28.

While the Buckeyes significantly outshot the Tar Heels in the first half (46.2 percent compared to 37.9 percent), Ohio State turned the ball over 12 times during the first half, resulting in 14 points for North Carolina. The Buckeyes turned the ball over just seven times in the opening round against James Madison, and overall, Ohio State had 16 games this season where it committed 12 or fewer turnovers.

After turning the ball over again on their first possession of the third quarter, Ohio State regrouped with an 8-3 run to take a 41-31 lead with 7:14 left in the frame, with McMahon adding a pair of jumpers during the stretch.

McMahon's score was the only basket for the Buckeyes over the next several minutes, though, as their only points came at the free throw line until a layup from guard Jacy Sheldon with 31 seconds left in the

quarter. At that point, the Tar Heels had embarked on a 14-7 run to cut the deficit to just 48-45.

After guard Rikki Harris picked up two fouls in as many seconds during a defensive stand, Mikesell converted an and-one opportunity to put the Buckeyes up 51-46 entering the fourth.

Despite the late push from the Tar Heels, the Buckeyes were able to seize momentum the rest of the way, opening the final quarter on an 11-4 run that was capped off by a triple from Mikesell to put Ohio State up 62-50 with 7:02 to go.

Ohio State opened the final quarter on an 11-4 run to go up 62-50 with 7:02 left, but after a break in the action due to a pair of injuries to North Carolina guards Eva Hodgson and Deja Kelly, the Tar Heels responded with a 9-0 run to make it 62-59 with 5:03 remaining in the game.

Forward Eboni Walker responded with the next four points for Ohio State to maintain a 66-63 lead, followed shortly by guard Taylor Thierry fouling out of the contest, but the Tar Heels finally broke through to take a 67-66 lead with 2:09 left.

Sheldon drove in to give the lead back to Ohio State, 68-67 with 1:07 left, and Walker was able to secure a tough rebound on the other end before Sheldon was fouled and sent to the line to put the Buckeyes up 69-67. On North Carolina's ensuing possession, forward Teonni Key was called for an offensive foul, but the Buckeyes turned the ball right back over to give the Tar Heels, who tied the game up with 9.8 seconds left.

On Ohio State's final possession, the Buckeyes were able to get the ball to Sheldon for the game-winning floater with just 1.8 seconds left, and North Carolina's final heave fell short to secure the win for the Buckeyes.

Ohio State's berth to the Sweet 16 is the 13th in program history, and the first back-to-back berths since reaching that stage in 2015-16 and 2016-17, though the later appearance was later vacated.

Looking now for their first appearance in the Elite Eight since 1993, the Buckeyes will move on to face either No. 7 Baylor or No. 2 UConn on Saturday in Seattle at Climate Pledge Arena, with a tip off time yet to be announced.