

No. 3 Ohio State Overcomes 17-Point Deficit In 87-81 Win Over Illinois



Midway through the third quarter of No. 3 Ohio State's matchup with Illinois on Sunday, it appeared the dream run for the Buckeyes to begin the season was coming to an end.

Ohio State - which entered the game 16-0 on the season - trailed 57-40, offering little in the way of answers to Illinois' shooting from deep and dominance in the paint. But the Buckeyes, as they've done all season, then flipped the switch, closing the quarter on a 25-8 run and going on to win 87-81.

Ohio State (17-0, 6-0 Big Ten) and Illinois (14-3, 4-2) traded blows throughout the first quarter, with no team leading by more than a possession. Both showed off their prowess from deep early, combining to shoot 5 of 14 from beyond the arc, with Illinois guard Genesis Bryant - who entered the game shooting 50.0 from beyond the arc - accounting for two of those makes.

After a layup from Illini guard Jayla Oden to put Illinois up 22-19 with 1:08 remaining, the Buckeyes responded with a free throw from guard Heveyenne Bristow and a layup from guard Taylor Mikesell - put in motion off an assist from guard Taylor Thierry, who corralled a rebound and found Mikesell down the court on a fast break - to tie it at 22 entering the second quarter.

Bryant added another triple to begin the second frame, the first points of a 10-2 run for Illinois to go up 32-24 with 6:13 remaining. Mikesell continued trying to will Ohio State back into the game, scoring eight of the Buckeyes' next 11 points, but Ohio State still trailed 47-35 after another triple from Illinois forward Brynn Shoup-Hill. Ohio State forward Cotie McMahon found the basket on the next possession, but the Buckeyes still trailed 47-37 entering the locker room.

The Fighting Illini shot 53.8 percent from the field in the first half and 40.0 percent from deep, compared to respective marks of 35.5 and 27.8 percent for Ohio State. Outside of Mikesell, who finished the first half with 16 points on 6-of-11 shooting, the Buckeyes had just 21 points on 5-of-10 shooting.

Mikesell looked to build some momentum in the third, connecting from deep on Ohio State's first possession, but Illinois responded with a 10-0 run that featured a pair of triples from Bryant and Shoup-Hill. As she's done in pivotal moments this season, McMahon got Ohio State back into the contest, taking less than a minute off the clock on a personal 7-0 run to make it 57-47 with 5:49 remaining in the frame.

After a free throw from Illinois forward Kendall Bostic, the Buckeyes took off on yet another run, this time an 11-0 stretch to tie the game at 58. Bostic scored on the next possession, but Ohio State guard Rikki Harris responded with her first triple of the game to give the Buckeyes a 61-60 lead with 1:50 remaining in the third, the first lead for Ohio State since it was 12-11 in the first quarter.

The Buckeyes finished the third quarter shooting 58.8 percent from the field and 42.9 percent from deep while outscoring the Illini 28-18. Illinois eventually tied the game up at 65 entering the fourth, but Ohio State opened the final frame with another triple from Harris to make it 68-65.

The Buckeyes later extended their lead to as many as nine points, 77-68, before Illinois cut the deficit to just 84-79 with 2:35 remaining. McMahon knocked down a free throw with 1:35 remaining, and following misses from the Illini on their next two possessions, Illinois was forced to foul, with Ohio State closing things out at the free-throw line for the 87-81 win.

Mikesell led the Buckeyes with 31 points on 11-of-22 shooting - including 7 of 14 from deep - while McMahon added 22 points on 6-of-10 shooting. Thierry also reached double digits with 12 points, while guard Hevynne Bristow led with eight rebounds. Illinois was led by Bostic with 25 points on 12-of-14 shooting.

Ohio State will have a six-day layoff, returning to the court next on Saturday when the Buckeyes travel to take on Nebraska. The tip is set for 2:30 p.m.