

No. 6 Ohio State Defeats No. 7 North Carolina 74-49 With Stiff Defense



The No. 6 Ohio State men's basketball team (8-0) knocked off No. 7 North Carolina (6-2) 74-49 with lockdown defense in front of 21,115 at the Dean Smith Center in Chapel Hill, N.C. on Dec. 4.

"We're getting there," Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said of his team's defensive ability. "We've got a lot of guys that are dialed and locked in. We've got a lot of good individual defenders, and we've embraced the idea of being collectively good."

Sophomore guard Duane Washington and junior forward Kaleb Wesson paced the Scarlet and Gray starters with 18 points and five rebounds, and 10 points and nine rebounds, respectively.

Senior forward Andre Wesson and freshman forward E.J. Liddell led the charge off the Buckeye bench with five points, nine rebounds and five assists, and 12 points, five boards and two blocks, respectively. Freshman guard D.J. Carton added eight points, four assists and two steals as a reserve.

The Buckeyes struggled offensively to start the game, failing to score through the first 2 minutes and 51 seconds, but Andre Wesson and Washington helped bring them back from an early 5-0 deficit.

Andre Wesson hit Washington for a three-pointer with an excellent cross-court pass, marking his first of three assists in just 2:25. The bucket sparked a 12-3 Ohio State run, where Washington hit three triples and Kaleb Wesson added another.

The Buckeyes battled back and forth with the Tar Heels for most of a physically played first half, where both teams played excellent defense. Ohio State held UNC to 28.6 percent shooting from both the field (10 for 35) and three-point range (4 for 14), while the Tar Heels pressured OSU into 10 turnovers along with five blocks.

Ohio State outrebounded North Carolina, 26-17, in the first frame while shooting 35.7 percent (5 of 14) from three, but 10 turnovers kept the contest close. The Tar Heels also missed the presence of 6-foot-10 freshman forward Armando Bacot, who suffered a leg injury early in the first half after recording four rebounds, one block and one steal.

Coming out of the halftime break strong, Ohio State ripped off a 10-3 run with three points from Kaleb Wesson, three more on an and-1 by Washington and a layup by Kyle Young from Washington.

"I was really pleased with the first six minutes of the second half," Holtmann said. "I thought that was maybe our best basketball. We settled down, we made smart decisions, we attacked them in certain areas, we made them work. I thought that was probably our best six- to seven-minute stretch of the game. That was critical."

The Tar Heels' freshman standout guard Cole Anthony, who led UNC with 15 points, fired back with back-to-back three-pointers to cut OSU's lead to 39-36. The visiting Buckeyes responded with nine straight points to push their lead to 12.

North Carolina head coach Roy Williams was visibly upset with his team's effort, pulling all five players at 10:42 and inserting a new group that included two walk-ons. The Tar Heels' reserve group gave them an energy boost, rallying on a 7-3 run.

Carton corralled the Buckeyes, leading them on a 14-0 run of their own with five points and two assists, helping them cruise to victory.

Liddell credited the team's extra emphasis on boxing out in practice for the 48-32 rebounding advantage over North Carolina, along with protecting the rim.

"The plan defensively was to keep them out of the paint and stop their offensive rebounding," Liddell said. "And that's what we did. We beat them on the rebound battle and we just kept working. We worked a lot on rebounding in practice, and that's what really helped us out because their second offense is rebounding."

Overall, Ohio State shot 46.4 percent from the floor and 38.5 percent from three-point range, while clamping down the Tar Heels, who shot a meager 27.4 percent on field goals and 30.4 percent from distance.

"It's been the same approach all year," Washington said of the team's defense. "Attention to details — play really, really hard and be the tougher team. We came out and had a chip on our shoulder as we always do and fought hard. They're a good team."

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