

Wrestling: No. 7 Ohio State Defeats No. 4 Arizona State, 17-16



In front of a sold out Covelli Center crowd and with Fox Sports 1 in town to air the dual, Ohio State landed a massive victory on the path to national title against Arizona State, 17-16.

The first half went about as well as it could have for the Buckeyes. A big upset by Jordan Decatur at 133 pounds set the tone for an overall upset, and excellent performances, as usual, by Luke Pletcher and Sammy Sasso gave Ohio State the momentum it was looking for early on.

After the intermission, Ohio State's confidence dwindled as Ethan Smith followed up Elijah Cleary's loss with one of his own, bringing ASU firmly back into the dual and well within striking distance.

The momentum shifted again as Kaleb Romero dominated Anthony Valencia at 174. Gavin Hoffman was able to avoid a tech fall defeat at the hands of Anthony's brother Zahid, setting up star Kollin Moore and heavyweight Gary Traub in a prime position to secure a massive win for the Buckeyes to open the new year.

Moore couldn't deliver extra points, but he did what he needed, leaving the match in Gary Traub's hands against one of the nation's best heavyweights.

Traub survived an onslaught of takedown attempts in the final minutes, showing off his defense in a decision loss, but doing enough to hold on to Ohio State's team score lead, with the Buckeyes knocking off ASU, 17-16.

125 POUNDS

Ohio State's Malik Heinselman got that sold out crowd onto its feet early with a takedown just over a minute into the first round, but lost his two point advantage quickly as Arizona State's Brandon Courtney escaped, and recorded a takedown of his own. A Heinselman escape evened the score at three, but another Courtney takedown, followed quickly by a Heinselman escape gave Courtney a 5-4 advantage after the first period.

With Heinselman looking to defend in the second period, starting in the bottom position, he was able to even the score again at five with another escape. A brilliant last second recovery prevented another

Courtney takedown, and kept the score knotted at five entering the final period, with Heinselman looking to notch his tenth win of the season, against the 15th ranked Sun Devil.

Despite a strong start, the young Buckeye faltered down the stretch, surrendering an escape and suffering another takedown early in the final period. Unable to mount any offense in response, Heinselman fell to Courtney, 9-5 after a bonus riding time point was awarded, giving Arizona State an early 3-0 lead in team score.

Courtney def. Heinselman, D, 9-5. TS: 3-0, ASU

133 POUNDS

The building erupted when top freshman Jordan Decatur entered the center of the ring to square off with No. 15 Joshua Krammer. He immediately made good on that excitement, nearly notching a massive takedown in the opening seconds, before fighting off the veteran Krammer on the way to a 2-1 lead at the end of the first period. Krammer had several takedown chances, but Decatur flashed his immense athleticism, escaping his grasp at every turn.

Decatur controlled Krammer for much of the second period after starting on top, with the senior Sun Devil unable to escape until just over a minute left in the period. Again on the precipice of being taken down, Decatur was the stronger man, forcing an out-of-bounds call and holding onto that 2-2 draw entering the third period.

An escape again brought the crowd to its feet, and with an enormous upset for the true freshman in sight, Decatur rose to the occasion, chalking up another takedown with just over 30 seconds to go. Krammer scrapped for one more takedown, but Decatur looked every bit the part of an elite prospect on the way to a signature victory in his young career, and three points for the Buckeyes.

Decatur def. Krammer, D, 5-3. TS: 3-3

141 POUNDS

After two opening matches that heavily favored Arizona State on paper, Ohio State returned to comfort at 141, with No. 1 ranked senior Luke Pletcher squaring off with ASU's Navonte Demison, a redshirt sophomore that entered the dual with a 2-6 record on the year.

Two quick takedowns confirmed that comfort, and a first round that saw Pletcher rattle off takedown after takedown, while nearly recording a pin on two separate occasions gave the Buckeye star a massive 16-3 lead after just one period.

Demison recorded a quick escape at the start of the second period, but a penalty and a takedown gave Pletcher the technical fall before he ever really had to break a sweat.

Pletcher def. Demison, TF, 19-4. TS: 8-3, OSU

149 POUNDS

Another stronghold weight for the Buckeyes matched up No. 6 Sammy Sasso with No. 25 Josh Maruca.

With Sasso looking to respond after a second place finish at the Cliff Keen Invitational in Las Vegas in December, the Buckeyes entered the dual with big expectations for the redshirt freshman.

Just as Decatur and Pletcher had, Sasso delivered early, forcing two takedowns to take a 4-1 lead into the second period.

A second escape brought Maruca within striking distance, but a late round takedown gave Sasso a comfortable 6-2 lead.

Maruca used his long frame to look for quick points as he built for a comeback, but Sasso's strength was too much. He escaped a takedown attempt after starting the final round on bottom, and spent the last minute of the round hunting takedowns.

He got one, with just over 30 seconds to go, but was unable to generate anymore to change his decision win into a major decision win. Still, with the bonus point for riding, Sasso was able to cruise to his 13th win of the season.

Sasso Def. Maruca, D, 10-3. TS: 11-3, OSU

157 POUNDS

Ohio State's three bout winning streak had the Buckeyes riding high, but 157 has given OSU troubles all season long. Elijah Cleary has struggled in large stretches to find his offense, but ASU was without a strength at 157 as well, inserting redshirt freshman Jacori Teemer into the lineup in hopes that he could improve on his 4-4 mark on the year with a defense-heavy battle.

Early on, it played out exactly as expected, as the two defended to a scoreless draw after one period. Teemer took command in round two, scoring an escape and a takedown in rapid succession, and while both threatened to do more, the only other scoring came from a Cleary escape, giving Teemer a 3-1 lead entering the final minutes.

In that final period, Cleary started on the bottom, notching an escape to cut the deficit to one. A review timeout gave both coaches a chance to talk with their wrestlers, but it wasn't enough for Ohio State to rally its embattled wrestler. Teemer recorded another takedown and picked up the bonus point to get ASU back into the win column.

Teemer def. Cleary, D, 6-2. TS: 11-6, OSU

165 POUNDS

Out of the intermission, Ohio State entered one of the biggest matchups of the night: No. 13 Ethan Smith (OSU) against No. 5 Josh Shields (ASU). Shields is a two-time All American, and while Smith has had a breakout year, this served as a serious test to see how far he has actually come early in the season.

The answer didn't come quickly, but it did come. Shields landed a first round takedown that Smith escaped quickly, before the two wrestled to a stalemate for the remainder of the first two minutes.

Smith searched for a takedown early in the second period that he nearly found before the battle was

taken out of bounds, but Shields never really found his footing in the second. Smith forced him out of bounds two more times in the first minute, keeping him in that bottom position and refusing an escape for the first 40 seconds. Shields finally did escape with just over a minute to go, and nearly forced a takedown, but Smith survived the flurry until Shields was able to knock him off balance to take a 5-1 lead.

Shields looked to defend in the third, holding Smith off for the final two minutes and securing a second straight win for the Sun Devils to cut into Ohio State's lead entering the final four battles of the evening.

Shields def. Smith, D, 6-2, TS: 11-9, OSU

174 POUNDS

The loss for Smith drained what was once an electric home crowd, but a top ten matchup between No. 9 Kaleb Romero (OSU) and No. 8 Anthony Valencia (ASU) looked to be the most important of the match, and garnered the attention of everyone in attendance.

Romero struck quickly and nearly landed a takedown before the play went out-of-bounds, sending the foes to a scoreless first round.

Romero opened the second round on bottom and recorded an immediate escape, before defending a strong shot from Valencia, forcing a takedown of his own, and pushing the redshirt junior Sun Devil out of the ring to take a 3-0 lead. It was a dominant second period that established Romero not just as a true top ten wrestler but as a serious contender to be one of the best contributors on a very talented team.

He followed his tremendous second period with a commanding, controlled dismantling of the suddenly flustered Valencia. He picked up another escape to claim a 4-0 lead, and forced Valencia again to the edge of the mat. A gash on Valencia's forehead halted the match with 1:17 to go in the final period, but he was deemed healthy enough to finish the fight.

Valencia shot for takedowns quickly after his return, missing twice before suffering a crippling takedown with just 34 seconds to go on the outskirts of the match, where he had danced for nearly six minutes. Romero capped his performance with a bonus point, and a much earned expulsion of emotion to the reinvigorated crowd.

Romero def. Valencia, D, 7-3. TS: 14-9, OSU

184 POUNDS

Arizona State's No. 1 ranked Zahid Valencia could very easily be the best wrestler in the nation, as strong a title contender as they come and a heavy favorite entering this match against Ohio State's Gavin Hoffman. Hoffman has struggled with consistency all season, unable to yet reach the hype that came with his recruiting profile.

Valencia grabbed a takedown immediately, and then another after a Hoffman escape. He was hunting for points, much in the way that Pletcher did, and Hoffman had no real answer for the redshirt junior. A

near fall gave Valencia a commanding 8-1 lead just over 20 seconds into the fight. Another takedown gave Valencia a 10-3 lead entering the second round as he looked for a tech fall that would give Arizona State five points.

Another near fall in the second gave Valencia four more points and helped his lead balloon to 14-3, and despite a strong effort at the end of the round, Hoffman was unable to find the points to cut into that deficit.

In the final two minutes, Valencia recorded another takedown, but two Hoffman escapes were enough to withstanding the riding time bonus (Valencia had a whopping 5:56 of riding time) and secure a major decision loss, rather than a tech fall loss that would have given Arizona State a much needed fifth team point.

Valencia def. Hoffman, MD, 19-5. TS: 14-13, OSU

197 POUNDS

Arizona State's ringer couldn't get the five that the Sun Devils desperately needed from him, largely because of the man that checked in for Ohio State at 197 pounds. Kollin Moore is as good at hunting tech falls as anyone in wrestling, and with a ranked (No. 12) but overmatched Kordell Norfleet up against him, Moore was out for five points, or at least a major decision.

Norfleet struck first with a takedown in a response to an extremely aggressive start from Moore, but as the match settled down, so did Moore. The two traded takedowns and escapes to a 5-5 tie at the end of the first, which wasn't the start Ohio State had wanted but wasn't as bad as it could have been.

Moore escaped bottom position to start the second round, and the two traded feinted shots until Moore took Norfleet down on the outskirts of the mat with just seconds to go to take an 8-5 lead.

Moore opened the third with another takedown to counter two Norfleet escapes, and spent much of the final round, as Valencia had, searching for more points.

He couldn't find them. Norfleet wasn't able to stage any sort of serious comeback, but Moore wasn't able to pull away in the final moments to secure any more than three points for a decision.

Moore def. Norfleet, D, 11-9. TS: 17-13, OSU

HEAVYWEIGHT

With a four point lead in team score, all Ohio State's Gary Traub needed was to do was avoid a major decision or tech fall against No. 6 Tanner Hall.

The first round was about as good as Ohio State could have hoped for. In search of a defensive fight to keep the score low, Traub kept Hall at an arm's length, and the two went into the second round tied at zero. Traub avoided a takedown attempt from bottom to start the second, and as chants rung out throughout the arena, he fought off Hall again to force yet another out-of-bounds call with just over a minute to go in the second.

Through two, Hall remained scoreless, unable to crack Traub's defense, despite riding for nearly the

entire match. An escape in the third gave Hall his first point, but as the Covelli Center shot to life for the final run, Traub answered the call. He surrendered a takedown to give Hall a 3-0 lead, but registered an escape to hold onto a 4-2 decision loss after bonus points.

Hall def. Traub, D, 4-2. TS: 17-16, OSU