

Ohio State And Wisconsin Share Similar Trajectory Heading Into Thursday's Game



If Ohio State's battle with Wisconsin on Thursday was played prior to the month of January, it would likely be considered a marquee matchup.

The Buckeyes and Badgers entered 2023 with 9-3 and 10-2 records, respectively, but both floundered during January. Despite claiming a win over Northwestern on New Year's Day, Ohio State has lost seven of its last eight games while plummeting to 12th in the Big Ten with a 3-7 conference record, and Wisconsin has lost six of its last seven, falling to 4-6 in Big Ten play while landing a spot above the Buckeyes in 11th.

With both teams looking to get out of their respective funks, Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann recognized the Badgers as another difficult test as the Buckeyes look to right the ship during the back half of Big Ten play.

"We've got a big week in front of us with a good Wisconsin team, who has had some great wins on the season," Holtmann said on Monday. "They're tough, they've got a dynamic guard. They're well-coached and it will be a fun challenge on Thursday night."

Like the Buckeyes, the Badgers saw noted declines in nearly all major statistical categories during January. Wisconsin's offensive output dropped from 68.9 points per game during the season's first two months, to 59.3 points in January. The Badgers' efficiency also fell from 43.1 percent shooting to 39.9 percent during the stretch.

An injury to forward Tyler Wahl — Wisconsin's leading scorer with 12.6 points per game — helped expedite Wisconsin's unraveling. Wahl was held out of the first three games of the losing stretch, all of which resulted in defeats for the Badgers, but Wisconsin hasn't quite found legs with him back in the lineup either, boasting a 1-4 since his return on Jan. 17.

"I think their injury was significant for them during this stretch because he's such an important player for them," Holtmann said.

Regardless of Wisconsin's play during the recent stretch, Holtmann is well aware of the challenges of playing against the Greg Gard-coached Badgers. The Badgers are still one of the better teams in the conference defensively, holding opponents to 63.3 points per game — which ranks fifth in the Big Ten.

"They're a team that's always going to be disciplined, that's always going to be really hard to score on, that's always going to be a low-turnover team," Holtmann said. "They're always a really disciplined, focused team. They have a lot to play for, we have a lot to play for. It should be a great Big Ten matchup."