

Ohio State Defeats Kentucky 71-65 In CBS Sports Classic



The No. 5 Ohio State men's basketball team defeated No. 6 Kentucky 71-65 in the CBS Sports Classic at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas on Dec. 21.

In a neutral-site showdown between two of the nation's top teams, the Buckeyes showed why they belong in the conversation of the best of the best.

Junior big man Kaleb Wesson and junior forward Kyle Young set the tone for the Scarlet and Gray, excelling with flawless shooting in the first half and finishing with 10 points and eight rebounds, and 10 points and six boards, respectively.

"Poise possessions — I feel like we just came out and we tried to get the best shot on every possession," Wesson said. "I feel like that helped us get the win today."

Through the first 27:17 of the Buckeyes' matchup with Kentucky, the biggest lead held by either team was just four points. Freshman forward E.J. Liddell finished on a feed from senior wing Andre Wesson to go up five with 12:43 remaining and Kaleb Wesson pushed the lead to seven with a pair of free throws with 10:47 left.

"The counter-punches, teams going back and forth for a 40-minute grind is what we try to talk about at the beginning of the game," Wesson said. "And I feel like we went out there with that mindset and that mentality and came out with a win."

The Wildcats cut that lead to just one point, but the Buckeyes held off their final push with strong play from the guard trio of freshman D.J. Carton, sophomore Luther Muhammad and junior C.J. Walker down the stretch.

"We know what kind of player D.J. is," Young said of Carton. "We know what he can bring to us. We know he was able to stay poised tonight, make some big plays for us down the stretch and we're just happy to have him out there."

Carton finished with 15 points on 5-of-6 shooting along with five rebounds, two assists, two blocks and one steal, while Walker added nine points and five assists and Muhammad posted seven points and two

steals.

The No. 5 vs. No. 6 showdown proved to be an extremely even matchup, with Ohio State taking a narrow 37-36 lead into halftime.

“They had great competitive spirit,” Holtmann said of Kentucky. “Our guys certainly did as well and they responded to every minute. I think about the three in the first half that Andre Wesson hit, where the momentum of the game could have gotten away a little bit, maybe if they had went up a point or two.

“There were a lot of those plays where we were able to stymie their momentum just enough. The game had a really good life and competitiveness to it.”

In a back-and-forth first half, the Buckeyes out-shot the Wildcats 52.2 percent to 50 percent from the field, while both teams went 23.1 percent (3 of 13) from distance. Ohio State committed nine turnovers to Kentucky’s six, but the Scarlet and Gray knocked down 10 of 12 free throws while the Wildcats only made 3 of 4.

Young and Kaleb Wesson led the way in the first frame, combining to shoot 5 of 5 from the floor and 6 of 6 from the foul line, with 10 points and two rebounds, and seven points and four boards, respectively.

Kaleb Wesson fouled out with 3:30 left in the game, but the Buckeyes closed out the game strong in his absence. Sophomore guard Duane Washington returned after a two-game absence due to a rib injury, scoring eight points on 2-of-7 shooting.

Kentucky’s 6-foot-9 forward Nate Sestina, a grad transfer from Bucknell, kept Kentucky in the game all evening by hitting 5 of 8 three-pointers for 17 points. Sestina also played well against the Buckeyes last year for Bucknell, hitting two triples and scoring 10 points in 13 minutes.

“He’s a great player,” Young said of Sestina. “We’ve played him previously, so we knew what his game was about. We knew he’s a player who made big shots.”

Overall, Ohio State put 50 percent of its shots through the hoop and connected on 31.6 percent of triples. Kentucky knocked down 42.4 percent of its field goal attempts and 30.4 percent of three-pointers.

The Buckeyes also won the battle of the boards, out-rebounding the Wildcats 33-25. Ohio State held a big advantage at the free-throw line, making 21 of 27 attempts, while Kentucky went 8 for 13 at the charity stripe.

The Buckeyes do not play again until their game against a talented West Virginia team at noon on Sunday, Dec. 29 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse in Cleveland, the home of the Cavaliers of the NBA.

“We’re not putting any stock into the haters or No. 1, we got our fannies drilled at Minnesota,” Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said. “But listen, it’s a great win leading into Christmas, I don’t want to understate it, it’s a great win leading into Christmas.”

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