

Ohio State Defeats No. 15 Rutgers 79-68 Behind Stellar Shooting, Solid Defense



The Ohio State men's basketball team carried the momentum from a 27-4 mid-game run to defeat No. 15 Rutgers 79-68 at the Rutgers Athletic Center Jan. 9.

The Buckeyes (9-3, 3-3) were led by 17 points from junior guard Duane Washington Jr., a 15-point performance by sophomore forward E.J. Liddell, who added six rebounds and three blocks, and a solid all-around outing from fourth-year junior wing Justice Sueing, who posted 12 points, 10 boards, and five assists.

"We're really just reading the game and sharing the ball, that's the biggest thing," Sueing said. "Being able to share the ball and move the defense really puts us in a good position against other teams, especially with the versatility, the talent that we have through all five positions.

"And then, more importantly on defense - I feel like our offense will always come around - but as long as we hold up on defense, and we stay aggressive and we stay locked in, it's always going to translate to offense, and it did."

Rutgers (7-4, 3-4) fought hard until the end, but Ohio State hit 5 of 6 free throws in the final minute to hold on for an 11-point victory on the road.

Stellar shooting and solid defense helped Holtmann's squad topple the 15th-ranked Scarlet Knights for the second time this season. Ohio State shot 51.0 percent from the field (25 of 49) and 41.7 percent from deep (10 of 24), while holding Rutgers to 43.9 percent from the floor (29 of 66) and 25.0 percent from three (5 of 20).

"The biggest thing is just our aggression," Sueing said. "And then our positions, everyone has

something that they bring to the table. We went in early to E.J. and K.Y., they're really good for us down low and still mobile at the same time, as well as our shooting and decision-making on the wings on the perimeter. I just think us combining those together, and being able to play off each other really complements us as a team."

The Scarlet and Gray led 74-61 with just 92 seconds on the clock, but senior guard Jacob Young ripped off five quick points to cut the deficit to single digits 74-66 with 59 ticks left.

"We just didn't handle it very well, but our guys responded," Holtmann said of Rutgers' late pressure. "We were able to get enough stops, I think our defense carried us."

After Rutgers had clawed back to cut the lead to 67-57, but the Buckeyes responded with a dunk by senior forward Kyle Young and a strong left-handed layup by Washington to extend the edge to 71-57 with 2:40 left. Kyle Young's run-ending slam came on a superb pass by Liddell out of a double team.

"The biggest play in the game was our ability to score late when we were having trouble scoring, and E.J. making that pass to Kyle on the post trap," Holtmann said. "They were switching the defense a little bit; they were going zone to man some. That bothered us a little bit, particularly without Jimmy in there. But E.J. made a great pass there, a great decision. That gave us a little bit of a breather there with a couple minutes to go."

An 8-2 spurt by the Buckeye bench gave the visitors a 65-43 lead with 9:37 to play, but the Scarlet Knights rallied on a 14-2 run to cut the deficit to 67-57 with 3:50 on the clock.

After battling back and forth with Rutgers, Ohio State led 57-41 with 12:19 left in the game. The Buckeyes' bench gave them a critical 8-2 spurt with a pair of triples from junior wing Justin Ahrens and senior forward Seth Towns and a pair of foul shots by freshman center Zed Key.

The Scarlet Knights cut the lead to 15 points early in the second half, but the Buckeyes bounced back with a jump hook by Kyle Young and a stepback three-pointer by Washington to push the lead to 52-32 with 15:56 to play.

Desperate to change the game's momentum, Rutgers trapped Liddell while trailing 17 points less than three minutes into the second half. Liddell threw the ball away against the pressure to lead to a layup for Rutgers senior guard Jacob Young to make it 47-32 with 17:34 left.

Opening the second half with a turnaround fadeaway jumper by Liddell and a three-pointer by Kyle Young, the Buckeyes put a bow on an extended 27-4 run that spanned 10:14 overall and gave them a 47-30 edge just 1:26 into the second half.

Ohio State roared on a 22-4 run to end the first half, turning a six-point deficit to a 42-30 lead at the break across the final 7:48. The game-breaking rally was sparked by back-to-back triples by Liddell and Washington and capped by a filthy behind-the-back move for another three for Washington.

The Scarlet Knights' 10-0 run that bled into a 13-2 stretch gave them a 26-20 advantage with 7:48 until the midway intermission.

Ohio State extended its lead to 18-13 with 11:25 until halftime on a strong finish by Key after he grabbed an offensive rebound. Rutgers responded by ripping off a 10-0 run, aided by the Buckeyes' only

three turnovers of the first frame coming in a 50-second span.

The Buckeyes' playmakers picked up their contributions in fifth-year senior point guard C.J. Walker's absence, with senior guard Jimmy Sotos drilling two three-pointers and Sueing dished four dimes across the opening 6:21 of the game to give them a 16-11 lead.

"Jimmy did a great job today, stepping up and leading us starting off the game," Kyle Young said of Sotos. "He got us a huge lift early on so we just look to those other guys to bring the same energy."

Overall, Ohio State dominated on the glass, out-rebounding Rutgers 43-29. In addition to the outings of Liddell and Sueing, Kyle Young scored 13 points and grabbed five rebounds, while Key added eight points and six boards inside.

"How we came out with our energy level and intensity was better," Kyle Young said. "We were more committed to what we were doing with setting the tone. You definitely can tell the difference when that happens, and that's something we need to continue to improve on."

Jacob Young paced Rutgers with 19 points on 9-of-15 shooting, and junior center Myles Johnson added eight points and eight boards.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of Dept. of Ohio State Athletics.

For four free issues of the print edition of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, no card required, sign up at the link here: <http://www.buckeyesports.com/subscribe-4issue-trial/>