

Ohio State Eyes Season Sweep Of Iowa



As the final seconds ticked off the clock at Value City Arena, Ohio State forward Zed Key caught a cross-court pass from Isaac Likekele before spinning away from Iowa forward Kris Murray and throwing down a two-handed slam to put the exclamation point on the Buckeyes' 93-77 win over the Hawkeyes on Jan. 21.

The Buckeyes' shootout victory over Iowa marked the last time Ohio State triumphed over an opponent, with OSU reeling on a six-game losing streak, and was its lone win across the last 12 games. Despite Ohio State's recent struggles, Iowa head coach Fran McCaffery recognized the challenges the Buckeyes provided his squad the last time both teams met.

"They're an interesting team because they play hard, and they've got a lot of pieces and they're right there," McCaffery said. "Obviously they have our attention. They beat us by 16. They're in the fight every day, you can tell. (Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann) has them still playing hard, playing together and I think when you look at the individual pieces that they have, they've got a lot of different guys that can score.

"They've got a lot of different guys that can post up. They compete defensively. They've got some three-point shooters, and they've got some depth. It's a team we have the utmost respect for."

Ohio State's last truly complete offensive performance came against the Hawkeyes, in which the Buckeyes shot 56.3 percent from the field, including an 8-of-16 mark from beyond the arc. Brice Sensabaugh dazzled with a career-high 27 points on a 10-of-12 shooting, while Likekele flashed his all-around potential with 18 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists.

The Buckeyes are in need of another jolt on the offensive end, as Ohio State has shot just 40.0 percent from the field and 24.5 percent from three in the six games since the win over Iowa. Ohio State is coming off one of its worst performances in the Holtmann era, scoring just 41 points while shooting 28.3 percent from the field against Michigan State on Sunday.

Iowa provides the perfect opportunity for Ohio State to get its offense back on track. The Hawkeyes allow 73.4 PPG while allowing opponents to shoot 46.2 percent, both of which rank at the bottom of the Big Ten.

However, the Hawkeyes boast one of the most potent offenses in the nation, producing a Big Ten-best 80.6 points per game while shooting 45.4 percent from the field. Forward Kris Murray leads the charge for the Hawkeyes, scoring 21.0 points per game — which ranks second in the Big Ten behind Purdue's Zach Edey — while guard Connor McCaffery distributes the ball at a high level, displaying an assist-to-turnover ratio of 3.5, the best mark in the Big Ten.

While Iowa provides several unique challenges for any defense, Holtmann noted that the Buckeyes will have their hands full on Thursday against a solid Hawkeye team that defends their home court well.

"They're very good at home," Holtmann said. "They're a good team, but they're very good at home. It's always a great crowd, energized crowd. They've got really good players. We played them well here, played well offensively and defensively too.

"They're just a really good rebounding team. They're very good in transition. They're very good at executing team offense and their changing defenses can bother you for sure."

The Buckeyes and Hawkeyes tip off at 9 p.m. from Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City, Iowa. The game will be televised on ESPN2.