

Ohio State Fizzles Down Stretch, Falls To No. 20 Wisconsin 62-54 For 16th-Straight Road Loss



Ohio State's second-half comeback fell short Tuesday night at the Kohl Center, with the Buckeyes succumbing to poor shooting and sluggish offensive play down the stretch to fall to No. 20 Wisconsin 62-54 and lose their 16th-consecutive road game.

The Buckeyes (14-11, 4-10) found themselves trailing the Badgers (17-8, 9-5) 34-21 at the half but managed to cut the deficit down to just five points with 9:49 left. But head coach Chris Holtmann's team — like many occasions on the road this season — was unable to get any closer due to some lackluster offense. The team missed 3 of its final 14 shots and committed two turnovers down the stretch, a sequence that allowed the Badgers to extend its lead to as high as 11 points and hold onto the eight-point win.

Wisconsin raced out to an early lead on its home floor, making four of its first five shots — with Ohio State conversely missing on four of its first six baskets — to go up 10-4 before the first media timeout. The Buckeyes answered out of the break with an extended 7-1 run that included two dunks and a three-pointer from Roddy Gayle Jr., the latter make tying the game at 11 with 11:40 left.

After the two teams traded twos, the Badgers broke their 6:36 field-goal drought with a triple from forward Steven Crawl, and a second-chance layup from guard A.J. Storr on their next offensive possession put them back up 18-13. But the Buckeyes tied it up again with five straight points, all coming from Gayle.

The game swung again in the Badgers' favor following a Bowen Hardman miss from the free throw line that would've tied the game at 20, as the home team scored five straight points to lead 25-19 after a Thornton turnover led to fast-break dunk from Storr with 4:00 left, forcing an Ohio State timeout.

The Buckeyes received a basket from Thornton coming out of the timeout — his first make in five tries — to cut the deficit to 25-21 with 3:23 left. But that was the last points Ohio State got all half as Wisconsin exploded for nine straight points to end the period and go up 34-21.

Wisconsin was able to finish the period on an extended 14-2 in large part due to a dismal offensive sequence for Ohio State that included one field goal in eight attempts, with four of those tries coming from beyond the arc. The Badgers, meanwhile, made five of its last 10 shots and received eight points from guard Max Klesmit during that stretch.

Ohio State's offense — or perhaps more aptly, Thornton — awakened at the start of the second half, connecting on five of their eight seven shots, with three of those makes coming from Thornton — to stay within striking distance, trailing 44-33 after a Hardman three with 13:40 left.

After the two teams traded baskets for several minutes, Ohio State chipped away at the deficit even further, going on an 8-0 run to trail 50-45 with 9:49 left, a sequence that included triples from Thornton and Hardman along with a layup from freshman forward Devin Royal.

The Buckeyes managed to stay within two possessions of the Badgers over the next few minutes of the game until Hepburn stole the ball from Dale Bonner and laid in a transition layup to go up 55-47. The two teams failed to score for the next 3:18 until Wisconsin extended its lead back up to double-digits, 57-47 off a Wahl reverse layup with 3:56 left.

Ohio State continued to falter on offense as the game reached its end, missing three consecutive contested layups — part of a 0-for-9 stretch — to stay at a 10-point deficit. The Buckeyes broke the 6:58 scoring drought with a driving Thornton layup with 1:36 left, but Wisconsin continued to take time off the clock — and extend its lead — with an offensive rebound and a three from Hepburn on the other end to bring the lead back up to 60-49 with just 30 seconds left.

The Buckeyes cut the deficit to eight off a Jamison Battle three with 16 seconds left — his first points of the game — but it merely window dressing for the stat sheets as the Badgers hung onto the eight-point win.

Ohio State was led in the loss by Thornton, who scored 16 of his 18 points in the second half on 7-of-12 shooting and added a team-high five assists. Gayle (10) and Mahaffey (10) both reached double figures on 9-of-18 shooting, while Okpara had a game-high three blocks. Wisconsin was powered by Crawl, who recorded a double-double with 16 points and 10 rebounds, while Storr added 14.

The Buckeyes will look to get back in the win column on Sunday when they welcome Wooden Award favorite Zach Edey and No. 2 Purdue to Value City Arena. Tip off is set for 4 p.m. on CBS.