

Ohio State Keeps NCAA Tournament Hopes Alive, Advances To B1G Quarterfinal With 90-78 Win Over Iowa



Ohio State used sparkling offense and a dominant second half performance from fifth-year forward and Minnesota native Jamison Battle to keep its NCAA Tournament hopes alive Thursday night at the Target Center in Minneapolis, taking down seventh-seeded Iowa 90-68 Iowa to advance to the Big Ten Tournament Quarterfinals.

The Buckeyes, who will now face off against No. 2 seed and 13th-ranked Illinois Friday night, led wire to wire by shooting a stellar 51.7 percent from the field (31 of 60) and 55.0 percent from three (11 of 20), including an impressive 72.7 percent in the first half. Ohio State also held a 37-16 edge in bench points and outrebounded the Hawkeyes 42-36, while also receiving 23 points from the Robbinsville, Minnesota native Battle in the second half.

Ohio State showed no nerves at the start of this quasi NCAA Tournament elimination game, connecting on four of its first eight baskets of the game — including two threes by sophomore guard Bruce Thornton — to take an early 10-2 lead and force an Iowa timeout. The Hawkeyes found their rhythm out of the break with an extended 13-5 run to tie the game at 15 with 12:19 left, a sequence that was powered by two triples from Iowa leading scorer and third-team All-Big Ten selection Payton Sandfort.

But momentum shifted back in the Buckeyes' favor after a basket by freshman forward Devin Royal — who was fouled but missed the and-one free throw — and a triple from fifth-year guard Dale Bonner, starting a more positive stretch for the Buckeyes that allowed them to push their lead to 25-17 after another Middleton three.

Ohio State — who made 13 of its first 18 shots and each of its first five threes — continued its offensive onslaught as the half progressed, going up 31-22 after three consecutive baskets from Okpara, Middleton and senior center Zed Key. The Hawkeyes answered with a 9-3 run to trail 34-31 with 4:47 left after a three from Hawkeyes guard Tony Perkins.

Another three-point barrage from Ohio State, this time from freshman guard and Minneapolis native Taison Chatman and sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr. on consecutive possessions, put the Buckeyes back up 40-33 with 3:35 left. Iowa scored five straight to trail 40-38 with 54 seconds left, but another

three from Middleton — his third of the half — followed by a Gayle block on the other end put the Buckeyes back up by five, leading 43-38, at the half.

Ohio State shot a scintillating 60.7 percent from the field (17 of 28) and 72.7 percent from three (eight of 11) in the first half, with five of those makes coming from Thornton and Middleton. But Iowa also was sound from the field, making 14 of its first 26 makes (53.8 percent) and five of its nine attempts (55.6) from three.

The hot three-point shooting continued for both squads at the early portion of the second half, who combined for four threes — including one from Robbinsville, Minnesota, native Jamison Battle, his first points of the night — before the first media timeout as Ohio State led 49-46 with 16:48 left.

Iowa's offense cracked first with one make in five attempts, allowing Ohio State to create some separation and embark on a 10-4 run to lead 59-50 — its largest lead of the night at that point — with 13:16 left after a Battle second-chance layup. The Buckeyes' advantage stayed within seven to nine points over the next few minutes until a Bonner steal and Key layup put Ohio State up 67-56 with 10:54 left.

Iowa responded with four straight points, but Ohio State took off again due to the efforts of Battle, who scored five straight to give the Buckeyes a 73-62 lead with 8:59 left. The Hawkeyes soon cut the deficit to eight, 73-65, with 7:40 left, but it did not get any closer the rest of the night.

Thanks to some strong defense from the Buckeyes, who held Iowa to just 4-of-15 shooting the rest of the way, Ohio State was able to gradually increase its lead, going up 84-72 after a Battle layup with 1:50 left, then later 85-73 after a Dale Bonner free throw with 1:42 remaining. Iowa tried to stay in it from the free throw line, but Ohio State sent the dagger with an emphatic Battle fast break dunk, putting the Buckeyes up 87-75 with 1:15 left.

Ohio State was led in the win by Battle, who scored each of his 23 points in the second half on 6-of-13 shooting along with a team-high eight rebounds. Thornton (14 points), Middleton (11 points) and Gayle (10) each scored in double figures, while Thornton also collected a team-high nine assists. Iowa was led by Sandfort, who scored 19 points on 5-of-13 shooting, including 4-of-8 from three.

With the win, Ohio State will now advance to take on No. 13 Illinois in the Big Ten Quarterfinal Friday night, with tip off set for 6:30 p.m. on BTN.